

RODNEY RAY

BY W. STEPHENS HAYWARD



RODNEY RAY;

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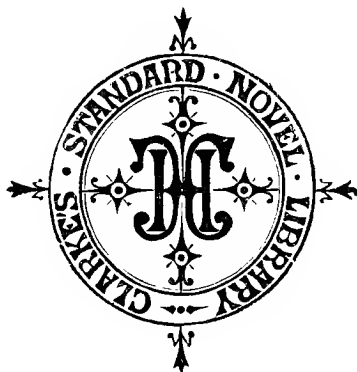
THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF A SCAPEGRACE.

BY

WILLIAM STEPHENS HAYWARD,

AUTHOR OF

“THE BLACK ANGEL,” “STAR OF THE SOUTH,”
“FIERY CROSS,” “REBEL PRIVATEER,”
ETC., ETC., ETC.



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RODNEY RAY:

A STORY OF SCHOOL AND THE SEA.

CHAPTER I.

SCHOOL DAYS.

FOR a scrapegrace, some considerable talent is necessary. A dunce may be a blackguard or villain, but could never attain or imitate that singular mixture of good spirits, good humour, bad behaviour, good looks, and bad habits, good fortune, and great impudence, which go to make up that anomalous character.

Your genuine scrapegrace is always getting into trouble, and getting out again, in the most marvellous and unexpected manner. Difficulties do not daunt him, misfortune does not dispirit him, hardships rarely affect his buoyant *devil-me-care* nature.

On the other hand, good fortune does him no good.

He is no sooner out of one scrape than in another, and the more lavishly the blind goddess scatters her gifts on him, the more lavishly does he in turn scatter and use them up.

Our hero was an excellent type of the genus scrapegrace. Blessed with good constitution, good looks, a good address, boundless impudence, and, moreover, good abilities, his parents proudly hoped that he would distinguish himself in the world, and give them cause to be justly proud of their son.

His father anticipated he would take high honours at Oxford or Cambridge, and that in due time his eloquence

would be heard in the senate of the nation, and that he would certainly attain and grace some high position.

But, alas ! it soon became apparent that those ambitious paternal dreams were doomed to disappointment. Our hero soon showed signs of a volatile, wild, adventurous spirit, and, moreover, laughed at and made fun of most of those things which his father held in especial reverence.

He horrified the neighbouring clergymen by speaking of the bench of bishops, in all the glory of lawn sleeves, as a pack of old women, and declared they only wanted mob-caps to complete their attire. As for nobility and ancient dynasty, he paid little heed to that, though the family of Ray was an old and good one.

Then, as to ambition ; he had none which could be put into a definite shape. He longed for adventure and excitement, for their own sakes, and not for any glory or reward to be reaped.

As for academical or other honours, the thought never crossed his mind. Though no dunce, he was not fond of study, and was well aware that to gain a Cambridge wranglership or Oxford first-class, many years of hard application were absolutely indispensable.

Still, though he was indolent and almost without ambition, he had a certain pride of his own which urged him not to be behind his fellows. Accordingly, at school he kept at or near the top of his class, apparently without any study whatever.

Rodney Ray had been at school—a public one—for three years, and, despite his idleness and carelessness, had risen from the first to the fourth form by the time he was fourteen. Before he was fifteen he had been transferred to the fifth, and soon worked up to the top of the highest but one in the school.

There was a matter of usage—an immemorial tradition—that flogging should not ascend higher than the fourth form ; that is, that boys in the fifth and sixth should be exempt.

Rodney Ray had been thrashed over and over again, not

for incapacity in school, or for idleness—though he richly deserved it for the latter—but for his *escapades* and scrapes after school-hours.

He bore pain well, and in time got so used to being caned that he cared nothing about it.

His father, who hoped, almost against hope, that as he grew older he would steady down, and apply his undoubted abilities to study, sent him a congratulatory letter; for Rodney, idle as he was, was the youngest boy in the fifth form, some of his class-mates being young men of eighteen and nineteen.

Rodney cared little for the letter of admonitory congratulation, but much more for the enclosed five-pound note.

Forthwith, and the very day after its receipt, he organized a grand repast in the sleeping-room at the second master's boarding-house. There were twelve other boys in this room, which was called the "lower long," and all these, with some other chums, were invited to a midnight feast.

All would have gone well, but, unfortunately, our scape-grace, not content with the supper, thought his hospitality would not be complete unless he indulged his guests in whisky-punch. Accordingly, he laid in a stock of whisky, and lemons, and sugar. But what about hot water?

Ever fertile in expedients, he purchased for a few shillings a good-sized tin kettle and spirit-lamp, by which some two or three quarts of water could be very quickly boiled; one of the basins would do for a punch-bowl, and a soup-ladle, which he bought for a shilling, would do admirably to bale out the delightful mixture.

For a time all went well; the supper was eaten quietly enough, the air of mystery and secrecy all the more enhancing the enjoyment.

Then came the brewing of the punch. This, too, was successfully accomplished; but, alas! both host and guests had failed to reckon the potency of the brew. A few glasses made the boys' eyes shine and cheeks flush; a few more, and many were noisy; and ere the night closed there was indeed a "sound of revelry by night."

To his shame be it said, Rodney was among those who got decidedly three sheets in the wind. Not being accustomed to his own potent brew, he imbibed it like ginger-beer ; and, so far from trying to quell the disturbance, he was foremost in it.

An abrupt close was put on this delightful bed-room punch-party by the entrance of one of the third and one of the assistant masters.

True it is that they were heard coming by some of the more watchful ones, and the warning cry—"cave"—went quickly round the room ; but though it might have been possible to make a general rush to their beds, put out the lights, and sham sleep under normal circumstances, and even to conceal the remains of the supper and night orgie—as things were, it was hopeless, and the angry masters burst into the room ere a third of the culprits could get beneath their sheets, while the lights were still burning, and the wreck of the repast in full view.

Among the pretended sleepers, however, was Rodney Ray. To hear him snore one might have supposed that he was in a sleep as deep as that of Rip Van Winkle.

It was of no avail, however. A very brief survey of the ruins of the feast convinced the enemy (*i.e.*, the masters) that all must have been concerned, and that an uncommonly heinous offence against school discipline had been committed.

Very little was said or done that night, however. The unhappy half-dressed boys who were caught out of bed were allowed to s ramble and roll in as best they could. The remaining punch in the basin was carried off, as were the whisky-bottles, emptied and otherwise ; also the sugar and the lemons.

Then the victorious enemy, having despoiled the camp, retreated, leaving the unfortunate detected ones to brood over the thoughts of the morrow. Those in the fifth and sixth forms confidently anticipated heavy impositions, while the lower-form boys felt dolefully sure of a sound caning each.

As for the whisky-punch and lemons which were left,

scandal at that school asserts to the present day that the two masters, having also secured the kettle, with the spirit-lamp, proceeded to make a fresh brew, and that while talking over the heinousness of the offence, they managed to get through the remainder. But that has nothing to do with the story, so it need not further be discussed.

But the morrow !

Ah ! it came too soon. The timid descended, trembling and guilt-conscious, at the sound of the breakfast-bell, and even the boldest knew full well there would be a tremendous row.

The boarding-house was that of the second master, who happened to be away for a couple of days.

The name of this gentleman was O'Brien, and he was of all the masters and assistants the most unpopular.

Breakfast passed over in silence. Pale faces, and eyes conspicuous by their heaviness, told of the headaches and misery which the delinquents endured, their brains racked and stomachs sickened by the unaccustomed punch, and their minds painfully conscious of approaching punishment.

As the school-bell commenced to ring at a few minutes before nine, Mr. O'Brien rose and addressed the boarders—

“After what has occurred, you will not be surprised when I inform you that a strict investigation will be held to discover the ringleaders and authors of the disgraceful affair of last night. All boys belonging to the ‘lower long’ room will remain, and not go into school this morning.”

Mr. O'Brien was a short, thick-set, vulgar, and generally obnoxious man. But, hated as he universally was, never was he so much detested as on this morning. Aching heads, sick stomachs, and heavy eyes, were punishment enough, the unhappy culprits thought ; but when, in addition to these evils of their own creation, there loomed up the certainty of a hard caning, and aching limbs to follow for a day or so, he, the said O'Brien, who would probably be the executioner in the second master's absence, was hated with no common hatred.

After breakfast the investigation began. One by one the

boys were called into a large empty chamber called the play-room, which play-room was also used for flogging those who were doomed to that punishment for breach of "house discipline."

The object of Mr. O'Brien was to discover who gave the party—who was the prime mover, the master spirit, in last night's affair.

All were bound in honour to secrecy ; but it is hard to find a dozen men—to say nothing of boys—among whose number there shall not be some recreant or faint-hearted.

It was so on this occasion, at all events, and soon Mr. O'Brien elicited the fact that Rodney Ray was the great culprit. He had long had what the Yankees call a "down" on him, and determined to make a signal example of this unruly scholar.

Our delinquent hero was called in last, and after him all the other boys.

O'Brien stood in the centre of the room. Pointing to a spot within easy distance, he said, harshly—

"Stand there, sir."

"Yes, I will stand there," replied Rodney as he moved across the floor ; "but what for, may I ask ?"

"I am going to cane you, you young scoundrel ; and while punishing you for the affair of last night, I shall not forget your former insolence on other occasions."

Rodney's cheeks blazed at the word scoundrel ; and, boy as he was, he felt inclined to show fight. But a moment's thought convinced him of his utter powerlessness in a struggle with O'Brien, who was a powerful man in the prime of life.

He bethought himself suddenly of his recent promotion, and said—

"I am in the fifth form, and am exempt from caning."

"You are in the fifth form, and as such deserve double punishment for setting so bad an example to those younger than yourself ; and, so sure as my name is O'Brien, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

As the third master spoke, he advanced towards Rodney,

cane in hand. The latter slowly retreated, and he said, defiantly—

“You shall not cane me, so sure as my name is Rodney Ray!”

“Ha! you young whelp, you defy me, do you?”

With those words Mr. O’Brien followed him up. But Rodney had, with lightning-like rapidity, matured a plan of action; and, what is more, had the nerve and pluck to act upon it. Standing on a table near the open window at the far end of the room, was a heavy pewter inkstand filled with ink. This he seized, and before the astounded third master could avoid it, hurled it at his head.

The aim was true, and it was sent with good force. Down went O’Brien, cane in hand, smothered in ink, which streamed over his head, face, and shoulders. Rodney Ray seized the opportunity, snatched a cap from a peg, leaped on the table, turned, and, for a moment or two, regarded his fallen adversary as he blundered to his feet.

Then he laughed—a clear, bold, defiant laugh, and said—

“Good bye, boys; I’m off.”

And he was off; leaping from the window down into the garden, he climbed the palings, and started off along the road at a run.

Our school was some twenty miles from London, and three from the nearest railway station. But, young as he was, Rodney was too clever to make for this. He remembered that he might be pursued, so struck out at a brisk pace for the next station on the line, distant some eight miles.

“If ever I go back to that school as a pupil again, my name’s not Rodney Ray,” he said to himself.

This was how our scapegrace left the school two months after his fifteenth birthday; and here we will end the chapter.

CHAPTER II.

RAN AWAY FROM SCHOOL.

YOUTH and health are wonderful aids to the spirits, and when Rodney Ray arrived at the little country railway station, after a brisk walk of a couple of hours, he felt quite exhilarated at the thought of his having emancipated himself, and for ever cast off the trammels of school discipline.

There was a small inn opposite the station, dignified with the name of the Railway Hotel, and here our hero repaired, and ordered bread and cheese and beer.

He had more than an hour to wait for the next train for London, he found—so he examined his resources, and chalked out for himself a plan of action. After paying his fare (second class) to the metropolis, he would only have two-and-sixpence left. This, however, did not daunt him in the least. To his sanguine mind it seemed amply sufficient. He calculated it would purchase him bread and cheese, with an occasional half-pint of beer, for three days ; and in that time he felt certain he could walk the sixty odd miles to his father's house. As for sleeping at night, that did not trouble him. He would take his rest under a hayrick in the middle of the day, he said to himself, when the sun shone high in the heavens and the autumn air was sultry. These long moonlight nights it would be delightful walking, and he was in no fear of missing his road, for the old coach turnpike ran from the west-end of London right through the village near which the paternal estate was situated.

After he had made his calculations, and eaten his bread and cheese, he asked for pen, ink, and paper, and addressed a letter to one of his schoolfellows—George Vane, his particular chum. George was in the sixth form, had good abilities, and, unlike our scapegrace hero, did not object to mental labour. Thus ran the letter :—

"DEAR GEORDIE,—You will have learned before you receive this, that I have cut the concern—or, as a sailor would say, deserted the ship—not that such an old hulk, with such a lubberly third officer as O'Brien, deserves the name. Talking of O'Brien, I have enclosed an epitaph for him. I don't suppose I killed him, though the inkstand did hit him a deuce of a clump on his thick head. However, he can't complain if he's kilt right out. Didn't he threaten he'd flog me within half an inch of my life? Long practice has doubtless enabled him to calculate to a nicety—to a hair's breadth—how much licking a fellow can stand without kicking the bucket. I don't pretend to be so skilful, not having had the like experience; and if I am half an inch on the wrong side, and have settled him, it is only a little error in judgment. Anyhow, dead or alive, I enclose his epitaph. If he still lives, to the terror of the small boys, put it about well, and nail a copy to his door—it will make him awfully savage. I don't know what I shall do yet, old fellow; but anyhow, I shan't come back to school—that is dead certain—I'll be chopped in pieces first. I will write again when I arrive home, in the course of a day or so. It's a long walk, but luckily I've got easy shoes, and the weather is beautiful. Good bye for the present.

" Faithfully yours,

" RUNAWAY RODNEY RAY

" P.S.—There's alliteration for you !"

This characteristic letter contained an enclosure—the epitaph spoken of, and a rough likeness of the obnoxious. O'Brien—with a huge, shaggy head and mane like tha to fa lion, and the body and ears of an ass. The epitaph was **very** neatly written on a mimic tombstone, headed :—

Sacred to the Memory of

FREDERICK O'BRIEN,

&c., &c., &c.

Then followed the verses :—

Here lies F. O'Brien,
More jackass than lion.
When he was alive
He used to thrive
On impositions and thunder—
But now he's dead,
With his blunder-head
By an inkpot split asunder.

This ridiculous effusion gave Rodney great satisfaction, and after having read it and re-read it several times with infinite glee, he put it in an envelope with the letter, which he intended to post on his arrival in London. The hour passed, and a few minutes after the time the train rumbled up. He took his ticket, and, as he entered the carriage, observed a fly driving up at a furious pace.

"Some one too late to catch the train," he thought to himself. But as the trap approached, he recognized the red head and disagreeable countenance of Mr. O'Brien protruded from the window. Just as the fly dashed up the whistle shrieked, and the train began slowly to move, the engine snorting in slow, laborious puffs, as though it had hard work to start. Rodney Ray for a moment entertained the idea of escaping by the other door of the carriage, and trusting to his legs across the fields. But, on second thoughts, he sat still, remembering that the train had started, and would not be likely to stop. Not so, however, thought the subject of his epitaph. The road at this point ran parallel with the rails for nearly half a mile, a fence being the only division. O'Brien shouted to the engine-driver to stop, and then told the flyman to drive alongside the train.

"Stop, stop! Do you hear, man! There's a runaway in the train. I can see him laughing at me from the window."

The driver and fireman only grinned—their white teeth gleaming in contrast to their grimed faces.

"Stop! stop! In the name of the law, I command you to stop."

"Who be you?" shouted the engine-driver.

"I'm one of the masters of—— school," shouted O'Brien, "and there's one of our boys run away, and in your train."

Again the engine-driver and stoker grinned, and as the train continued to quicken its speed, Rodney felt quite safe, and now leaned out of the window, laughing and jeering at his disabled antagonist. The latter, however, furious with rage, yelled and hallooed at the driver of the train to stop, threatening him with the most dreadful consequences if he dared refuse. But as the train gathered impetus it became each moment more and more difficult for the fly to keep pace with it. In obedience to the repeated orders of O'Brien, who seemed beside himself with rage at the sight of his runaway scholar, and at hearing the taunts flung at him from the railway-carriage, the flyman urged his horse from a trot to a canter, from a canter to a gallop.

"Go it, cabby," shouted Rodney Ray, in high glee; "whip that old camel of yours up."

"What do you call a camel, you imperent young rascal?" roared the flyman, now almost as incensed as his fare.

"Why, that four-legged animal that's dragging your lumbering old bathing-machine along. Call that a fly?"

"I'll give a sovereign if you'll stop," shouted O'Brien to the engine-driver.

No notice beyond a broad grin was paid to this offer.

"Five pounds, if you'll stop," roared the third master.

"Oh! you red-haired old Irish sinner," screamed Rodney, frantic with delight; "you know you haven't got five pounds—didn't you borrow a sovereign of Bob Rainsforth?—you know your quarter's salary ain't due this two months. Oh! you wicked old man; how's your poor head?"

O'Brien absolutely foamed at the mouth at being thus taunted with impunity. He grew purple with rage; but, alas! he was impotent.

"I'll give it you, you young scoundrel, when I get you back again," he yelled.

"Don't you wish you may catch me! Go it, cabby—whip

him up. It's all over," he cried, as the train forged ahead ; "you can't win—ten to one against the camel—ten to one on the bulgine. Hurrah !"

Waving his hat from the window, highly enjoying the excitement, Rodney Ray had the delightful satisfaction of seeing the fly drop slowly behind. He shouted a parting adieu to O'Brien, who shook his fist in impotent rage, and then, as the train dashed on far ahead, fell back on the seat and gave way to a burst of laughter. Another person, the only occupant of the carriage, joined therein. He, too, had been enjoying the fun, and quite understood what it was all about.

"Run away from school, eh ? and a few minutes too soon for the pursuit. By Jove, you are a young scapegrace."

CHAPTER III.

RODNEY AND THE DETECTIVE.

RODNEY'S companion in the railway carriage was a commercial traveller, and a very pleasant fellow ; so, finding this, our hero very soon confided the whole history of the previous night's frolic and the fracas in the morning.

"But, my lad, don't you know they may telegraph for you to be stopped at the terminus ? There are always policemen at the station, a part of whose duty is to arrest criminals escaping from justice."

At this Rodney looked very blue.

"Do you think they will stop me ?" he said.

"It's very likely, but it depends on how the message is worded."

"Ah ! he's in a towering rage, and won't care what he says."

"So much the better for you. You see they can't get a warrant, and send it by telegraph, and without that authority policemen who know their duty are very chary of arresting people. Still, in a case of felony it would be done, and the man detained till a warrant was got, or the prosecutor could come up and charge him. Now it seems to me that you

can't be charged with any offence at all. It is true that, were your schoolmaster present, the inspector or magistrate would deliver you up to his custody, but as he will not be there, I think it is very likely they will not detain you—that is, if you give a good account of yourself—make the best of your tale."

"Ah! yes, I see; escaping from dreadful ill-usage—not being allowed to communicate with my friends, am compelled to run away—going straight home to father, who will prosecute the rascally, brutal tyrant, and so——"

"You're a clever lad," said his companion, admiringly; "sharp enough, in all conscience."

"Yes, I think I am more rogue than fool."

While they were talking the train rumbled up to the ticket platform, and with the ticket collector there came a quiet-looking man, with short dark whiskers, upright carriage, and keen eye.

"You're in for it, my lad," whispered his fellow-traveller; "this is a constable in plain clothes."

Rodney, at a glance, saw that it was so.

"Your name's Ray, young feller?" the man said, seating himself beside him.

"Yes," replied our hero, with an affected surprise and innocence; "how did you know that?"

"I have received a telegraph message to stop you as a runaway."

"I am not accused of anything else?"

"No."

"Ah, then, that is all right; I suppose I shall have to come to the police station with you."

"Yes."

"That is just the very place I was going to myself; you can show me the way, which will save me a cab. Is it far from the railway?"

"About half a mile. You were going there yourself, you say," he asked, eyeing our hero keenly; "what for?"

"To apply for a warrant against the ruffian who telegraphed for me to be stopped. If I get one, can I telegraph back

and have him arrested at once?" he asked, with well-assumed earnestness.

"Can't say. But what do you want a warrant for?"

Rodney Ray replied with the utmost coolness, looking the police officer full in the face—"Attempt to murder. He had often sworn he'd kill me—had a spite against me for a long time; subject to fits of madness, I think. This morning he hunted me round the play-room with a wood-chopper. I managed to escape by jumping from the window; otherwise I should not have been alive now."

His audacious invention was so well told, and the lad looked so innocent and truthful, that the astute police officer was quite deceived.

"Ah! that alters the state of affairs considerably," he said. "What did he telegraph up for you to be stopped for?"

"Why, that's plain enough; so as to prevent me from applying to a magistrate. Don't you see?"

"Well, young feller, what you say seems all right enough. We'll see what the inspector says."

"Ah, yes; that will be the best way. Here we are in the station, and I am at your service. Good bye, sir!" he said, shaking hands with the commercial traveller, who had been greatly amused by the coolness and self-possession with which he crammed the detective.

"By the way," said Rodney, as they passed out into the street from the station, "am I a prisoner?"

"Well, not exactly a prisoner. You'd better come with me to the inspector, though."

"Yes, of course. Well, then, since I am not a prisoner, suppose we have a glass of ale at the hotel here—I am quite thirsty."

The constable preferred brandy and water, which Rodney paid for from his last half-crown, with an air and manner as if he had abundance. The detective was quite won over to his side, and they chatted together pleasantly as they walked on to the police-station; arrived at which, they were at once shown into the presence of Mr. Inspector Rugby.

"Prisoner, Sergeant Silverton?" asked this functionary, glancing at Ray, who was carefully dressed, and looked quite a young gentleman.

"Well, no, sir. He has a charge to prefer against a schoolmaster, for attempting to murder him, and wants a warrant, I believe."

"Well, what do you bring him to me for?" asked the inspector, testily; "you ought to know that I can't grant a warrant. He must apply to the magistrate."

"Yes, sir; but the schoolmaster has telegraphed up to the station for this young gentleman to be stopped."

"Ah! I see: who are you, young fellow?"

"My name is Rodney Ray; I am the son of John Everett Ray, Esq., of Donnington Park, Wiltshire."

"Where are you going?"

"To my father's house."

"Why did you run away?"

"To escape ill-usage."

"You have funds to carry you home?"

"Yes."

The inspector consulted, for a few moments, a brother official, and then, addressing the detective, said—

"Sergeant Silverton, I see no ground for detaining this young gentleman. He answers freely and satisfactorily enough. Besides, it appears he has a charge to prefer against the person who telegraphed for him to be stopped. Go with him to the magistrate, and show him how to apply for a warrant."

Now this did not suit our hero's purpose; so he said gravely, and after thinking for a moment or two—

"On consideration, sir, I think I will defer applying for a warrant until I see my father. He will at once put me in communication with his solicitor, who will assist me."

"Well, I dare say you are right. Anyway, you are free to go. I shall not take upon myself to detain you."

Rodney thanked the inspector, politely shook hands with the sergeant, and took his leave.

"A narrowish escape," he said to himself. "By Jove! I

believe if I hadn't invented that tale about the warrant they would have kept me till O'Brien came."

Probably he was right, and it was his impudence and presence of mind which carried him safely through.

A couple of hours later the third master arrived in hot haste by another train, and learned at the police station, to his great fury, that his prey had escaped him. Pursuit was now quite hopeless ; so he returned whence he had come, sullen and crestfallen at being thus laughed at and outwitted by a boy.

We need not accompany our hero in his solitary walk of sixty-five miles. Suffice it to say that he accomplished it in less than three days—sleeping under hayricks, and economising his little store of money, subsisting on bread and cheese. He arrived at his father's house a little footsore, but otherwise none the worse for his journey.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RETURN HOME.

JOHN EVERETT RAY, of Donnington Park, was a man of good family, and much respected in the country.

Squire Rodney, as he was called, was a proud man—self-willed and obstinate, but by no means of a bad disposition. Nor was he a bad parent. Had Rodney been anything else but a scapegrace he might have got on very well with the old squire. But it was not to be. The old gentleman was irritable and passionate.

It may well be imagined, then, that such a bold measure as running away from the highly respectable school where he was placed would be looked upon by the father as an almost unheard-of and quite disgraceful proceeding on behalf of his son. It was only the children of poor people and tradesmen who played truant, and that sort of thing. For a son of the house of Ray, it was something terrible.

It was evening when Rodney Ray arrived at the paternal mansion. His father had finished dinner, and was sitting

over his claret with a neighbouring clergyman—a man after his own heart.

The Rev. Edward Maitland was a pluralist, the incumbent of two parishes, each of which brought him in about eight hundred a year.

For Rodney Ray he had imbibed a strong dislike—partly because he was a scapegrace—partly because he laughed at and made fun of his reverence, but, above all, because his pretty daughter, Lucy Maitland, looked with favour on the harum-scarum boy. Lucy at this time was a beautiful girl of sixteen, nearly a year older than Rodney. Being on friendly terms with Squire Ray, and such near neighbours, he found it impossible to keep the young people from seeing each other when the boy was home for the holidays.

On these two, then seated over their wine, Rodney Ray suddenly intruded—tired, dusty, and travel-worn. Strange to say, the news of his flight from school had not yet been received ; for the first day no letter was sent at the instance of the third master, who hoped to recapture the fugitive, and on the following day, by an oversight, the post time was allowed to go by. When Rodney arrived home a letter was on its way, but could not be delivered till the following morning, as it was a two-days' post.

Thus it was that our hero intruded suddenly and quite unexpectedly on his father and the parson. He fully expected that his sudden departure from the school had been announced ere this, and was astonished when he heard his father exclaim—

“ Bless my soul, Rodney ! Is that you ? How did you come, and why did you not write to warn us of your arrival ? Is there a fever or anything at the school ? What is the meaning of your coming home in the middle of the quarter ? ”

“ I will answer your questions in due order, sir. As to how I came, I walked—at least, from London.”

“ Walked from London ! Is the boy mad ? ”

“ It is true, sir ; I walked every step of the way, and should have done so had it been twice the distance.”

"Please to explain yourself, sir," said Ray, senior, who began to have a suspicion of the truth.

"Well, sir—I ran away."

"Oh, you ran away! And you consider running away from school an act worthy of a gentleman—a member of an ancient and honourable family?"

"I did not choose to be flogged unjustly."

Here the parson put in a word.

"We have only your voucher for it that you were to be flogged unjustly."

"I had no right to be flogged; I am in the fifth form, and exempt from caning."

"And is it a part of your code at school that a boy in the fifth form may commit any offence with impunity?"

"It is the rule of the school, sir, and I don't see what you have got to do with it," replied Rodney, hotly. "I am not your son, thank Heaven!"

He saw the reverend gentleman's cheek redden and eye light up with angry fire.

"You are right. It is no business of mine. Your father will doubtless know how to deal with a boy who defies him and insults me."

This had the effect desired, and enlisted old Ray's scrupulous regard for the rights of hospitality in his favour.

"Silence, sir! I will not have a gentleman at my table insulted by a scapegrace boy, even though my son. Go to your room, sir, and remain there till I give you permission to leave."

"Is that all you have to say to me after walking sixty-five miles to come home?" asked Rodney, his heart burning with wounded pride and indignation.

"It was your own choice, sir. If you are tired, you had better go to bed," he added, quickly, his father's heart mollifying a little as he thought of that long, weary walk from London.

"First tell me, sir," the son said, "that I am not to go to that school again—that you have no intention of sending me back."

"I shall not promise anything of the kind. I shall consult with my friend Mr. Maitland, as to what is best to be done."

"Then, if you consult him, I need expect little mercy!" Rodney cried, angrily. "Anyhow, I can promise you one thing; I will not go back to that school again; and if I am taken by force, I will run away again on the very first opportunity."

"Go to your room, sir!" cried his father loudly, with anger in his face.

Rodney thought it best to obey, and accordingly left the room—not forgetting, however, to slam the door. As he went out, he heard the parson say—

"A terrible young scapegrace! You will have trouble with him, I fear, my dear friend. You must be firm, and break his spirit."

Those last three words filled Rodney's heart with indignation.

"Break my spirit!" he cried, angrily—"they can't break it—I'll die before I yield."

Those words, accidentally overheard, influenced his whole future life. No punishment inflicted by his father could have incensed him so much as to hear this parson, whom he disliked, talk coolly of breaking his spirit. It aroused all the evil passions of his boyish nature, and he went to bed in a mood the reverse of amicable. It was long ere he slept—lying brooding over what he had heard, and feeling as though he were cruelly illused.

In the morning there came by post full particulars—indeed, an exaggerated account, of his delinquency.

"So, sir," said his father, sternly, "the use you made of the money I sent you was to break the school rules, organize a disgraceful night revel, and make yourself and many of your schoolmates tipsy! And you have the impudence to complain of being unjustly flogged! If ever a boy deserved flogging, you did on this occasion, and in that view of the case my friend Mr. Maitland, though a merciful man, entirely agrees."

"I don't care what Mr. Maitland says, and don't want to hear anything about him," was the sulky reply.

"Very well. I need scarcely say that you will go back to school ; indeed, I will myself take you."

To this his son made no reply.

Mr. Ray kept his word, and on the following day started with his son for London *en route* for the now hated school. The boy's quiet manner deceived the father, and he thought that the rebellious nature was tamed. Arrived at the school, both were ushered into the presence of the second master. This gentleman was not disliked by his pupils, as he usually strove to mete out justice with an even hand and calm temper. Had he been at home on the eventful morning, it is probable he would have respected the school tradition by which the two top forms were exempt from corporal punishment. But, as the affair had occurred, and Rodney had set an example subversive of all discipline, he determined not to spare him, and at once told Mr. Ray that if he chose to bring his boy back to the school he must be punished as he deserved. Whatever compunctions the father may have felt, he made no objection, and our hero was doomed to a severe flogging. He was accordingly taken over to the school-house, where was the head master, who inflicted a severe caning, which Rodney bore without wincing or murmuring. His father had not left ; indeed, was to stay to dinner with the second master, and could scarce credit the fact when he learned that the punishment, the dread of which he supposed had caused his son to run away, had been inflicted.

Rodney looked quite composed and cheerful, and, saving a slight flush on his cheek, and an occasional angry glitter in his keen gray eye, betrayed no signs of emotion. Certainly the pain had not made him cry, and when Squire Ray heard that he had borne his punishment without a murmur, he felt a certain stern pride in his offspring.

"The Rays were always a hardy race, and, scapegrace as he is, the boy has pluck," he said to himself—not without a certain amount of complacency.

"Now, my lad," he said to his son, "you've taken your caning, and that is all over. See that you endeavour by good conduct and application for the rest of the half to retrieve the effects of this mad escapade in the opinion of all, myself included."

Rodney made no reply to this, but addressing the second master, said, "Can I go to my room, sir?"

The master looked enquiringly at Mr. Ray, as much as to say, "Do you think he is to be trusted?"

"Yes, you may let him go, sir; I think I can answer for it he will not run away again, now that the caning is all over."

How little he knew of his son's disposition the result proved. The master, however, was an acuter observer, and thought he detected something lurking beneath the boy's quiet demeanour—a slumbering fire in his eyes. However, he did not wish to put his opinion in opposition to his parent's, and Rodney was allowed to go to his room.

In five minutes from that time our scapegrace was again on his way to London. This time he ran at his utmost speed, and just caught a train at the nearest station. He had sufficient money to pay his fare to town, and, moreover, a silver watch, which he had brought from home. This he sold for two pounds—much less than its value. His intention was to return home that night, resolved to convince his father that his resolution not to remain at the school was invincible. There was no train that night, so he put up at an hotel, and after having some dinner went to the theatre as coolly as though he had not taken, perhaps, the most important step in his life—fully intending to abide by all the consequences.

In the morning he went down home by the first train, and found that his father had not yet returned. In the course of the afternoon he did so, however, and at first fell into a towering passion with his graceless son.

"I will send you back to-morrow, you incorrigible young scapegrace, I will," he cried, angrily.

"Very well, sir; I cannot help it if you do—as I cannot

pretend to resist force by force, being but a boy. I shall, however, run away once more, and return home. If you again send me back after that, I shall run away again, but never come home, or look on your face again so long as I live."

Something in the boy's manner alarmed Mr. Ray, who at heart loved his children. Unhappily, the Rev. Mr. Maitland had acquired great influence over his mind, and he once more resolved to seek his advice. Rodney heard him express his determination so to do with feelings of rage and mortification not to be described. Shortly the parson and his father are closeted together, and, as he well knew, were discussing his fate.

Now here we must relate an instance of the moral obliquity which caused our hero to persuade himself sometimes that wrong was right. Eaves-dropping is undoubtedly wrong, and to be condemned, except under very peculiar circumstances; but Rodney persuaded himself that, as the clergyman was his enemy, and he the subject of conversation, it was quite right and proper that he should hear what passed. His father and his visitor were in the study, a small room adjoining the dining-room, with a window opening out on to the balcony. Rodney stole round and planted himself outside this window, in such a position that he could hear all that passed.

"My dear sir," he heard Mr. Maitland say, "totally irrespective of expediency, it is your bounden duty to tame this unruly youth's spirit, and subdue his temper; you must send him to school again."

"But he will run away again," urged Mr. Ray.

"That is not certain. Perhaps, had he no means of paying his fare down home, he would not, even on this occasion, have started to walk the distance again. The mistake was in allowing him to have any money, or, what is the same thing, a watch, which he would have no difficulty in converting into money. I'd advise you to send him back to school, and take particular care that he is penniless."

"Exactly so, my dear sir. But supposing that this does not subdue him, and he again runs away."

"Well, then, my dear sir, I hardly know what to say. I fear that it must be taken as proof that he is indeed incorrigible. Perhaps the only course would be to send him to sea."

"Send him to sea!" exclaimed his father; "I don't like the idea of a son of mine being sent to sea."

"Do you like the idea of a son of yours defying your authority, and behaving in a manner calculated to disgrace himself and family eternally?"

"No, no; I fear there is no help for it. I must take some steps of the kind, I suppose."

"Don't send him as a midshipman, with an expensive outfit and all that sort of thing, but let him go before the mast and rough it with the common sailors. Believe me, that a voyage in that capacity will humble him and make him glad enough to remain at any school at which you may please to place him."

They went on talking, but Rodney heard no more. The words of the reverend gentleman had awakened new ideas in his breast.

"Send him to sea!"

Why should he not go of his own accord? A life of adventure and excitement seemed to loom up before him in the future. Had not many lads ere this run away to sea, and afterwards distinguished themselves? Of course they had—and why should he not go and do likewise, instead of being ignominiously sent? Then he remembered what had been said about his being kept without money. He had sufficient shrewdness to be well aware of the great utility of some ready cash, whatever course he might adopt. But how was he to get any?"

A sudden thought struck him. Lucy Maitland had often lent him small sums of money, and offered to lend him more. He had always paid her back, and knowing that her father, whose one good point was love for his daughter, allowed her an unlimited supply, he resolved to see her and ask her.

So having made up his mind, away he started to the vicar-

age, distant some half-mile only. There was a light burning in the drawing-room, and stealing softly across the lawn, he approached and tapped gently at the window. He saw her advance a few paces, turn round, and stand in an attitude of listening. On his repeating the tap on the window pane, she started, and asked—"Who is there?"

"It is I, Lucy—Rodney Ray."

Instantly the girl ran forward and threw open the lawn window.

"Rodney—oh! you dreadful boy—what do you want? but come in, and then you can tell me."

"Lucy, I am going away to-morrow—perhaps for a very, very long time; perhaps I shall never see you again."

"Don't talk nonsense; I suppose you are going to school again. Papa has told me all about you running away. He was quite angry with me for taking your part, and says your spirit must be broken, and all sorts of harsh things."

Rodney's cheek burned.

"I don't care what he says of me. He hates me, I know, and there is no love lost between us."

"But you will go to school, and be a good boy, won't you, and come home at Christmas, and then we can be friends and see each other. Papa says he won't hear of my speaking to you—that you are a wild, unruly scapegrace; but you will mend, won't you? I can tell you I spoke up for you quite bravely, and made papa so angry!"

"I will never go back to school any more, Lucy."

"Never, Rodney?"

"Never—at least to that school."

"And what do you intend to do?" she asked, in dismay.

"I shall go to sea, and have all sorts of adventures."

"Oh, don't talk about it; you will be a dreadful pirate, or bold buccaneer, or something, and they will chase you and hang you to the yard-arm," she said.

"Anything is better than submitting. I won't be conquered, Lucy. I have sworn to myself I won't."

Lucy knew him well enough to be aware that he was not to be turned from his purpose by reasoning. Though nearly

a year older than Rodney, and looking on him as a boy, she had long acknowledged to herself his powerful self-will and superior strength of mind.

"Lucy, they are going to send me back to school without any money. I mean to run away again, and I have come to ask you if you can lend me some."

"Of course I can, and will, Rodney. But I do wish you would give up all thoughts of running away."

"I tell you I can't, and won't, Lucy; I am tired of school, and am rather glad that this has occurred. I long for adventure—excitement—to see life."

"Ah, Rodney!" she said, sadly, "I am afraid you will be very wild. Wait here; I will get my purse."

She tripped lightly away, and soon returned.

"See here," she said; "I have twenty-four pounds—four five-pound notes, and four sovereigns. You may take it all. Papa never asks me how I spend money. I have only to tell him I want more, and he will give it to me."

She handed him the purse.

"No, I will not have all. See—I will take three of the notes, and a sovereign. I wonder when I shall be able to pay you," he said, musingly. "It may be years—when, perhaps, I have made my fortune, and have a ship of my own—a beautiful, fast-sailing clipper, low in the water, with raking taper masts, and a flag flying with the 'Rover of the Sea' blazoned on it."

She laughed at his dream of the future, and then these two took leave of each other.

"Give me a kiss, Lucy," he said. "It may be long ere we see each other again."

She just laughed, blushed a little, and held her face to him in all innocence.

He kissed her ripe lips, and then they bade each other adieu, and parted. Not a very romantic leave-taking, but a much more sensible one, considering all things, than those we sometimes read of between youthful swains and their sweethearts.

The next day Mr. Ray kept his word, and Rodney was started off to school in charge of the footman. He had concealed the three notes and the sovereign in his sock, so that when his clothes were searched in the morning, by his father's order, the money was not found.

"Good bye, father," he said, before he started. "It may be many a long day before we meet again. Shake hands, and let us part friends."

The old gentleman was quite taken aback by his son's manner.

"Don't be a fool!" he said, with studied harshness, in order to hide some other emotion; "stay at school, and behave yourself, and I shall see you at Christmas, I suppose."

Rodney sighed, and walked slowly away with the man who was charged to take him back to school.

Rodney's object now was to escape from the custody of the servant who had charge of him. He cast about him for a long time as to how this could be best effected. The man was young, and long in the legs, and to escape by running he was aware was impossible, as, even if he were not stopped by any passers-by, his custodian was far the swifter of the two.

Whilst they were being whirled up in the train to London, he thought, and thought, and at last hit upon a plan which he resolved to try.

In order to lull suspicion, he affected to be very humble and submissive, and did not show the least desire to escape. They arrived in London shortly after noon, and it was but an hour's journey by rail to the school. Rodney proposed that they should stroll about sight-seeing for a while, then have some dinner, and go on to their destination at such an hour as would give the servant just time to catch the last train for home.

This the man agreed to, not sorry himself for an opportunity of spending an hour or two at his ease, roaming about, and gaping, countryman like, at all the wonders to be seen in London's crowded streets.

"Suppose we have a ride in a steamboat on the river," Rodney suggested, as they stood on Waterloo Bridge, looking over the parapet. "We can go up to Chelsea and back for sixpence each."

"Well, Master Rodney, as you seem reasonable, and don't give no trouble, you can have your way—that is, if you'll behave yourself, and not be up to any tricks."

"Oh, all right," replied our hero; "what's the use of running away again? I see the governor is determined to send me back every time, if I keep on for a month."

"That's right, master; stop at school, as your pa wants you, like a good young gentleman."

"Yes, I suppose that is the best thing to be done, James," he said, assentingly, though firmly resolved on a totally different course. "Let's come down the steps here to the landing stage, there'll be a Chelsea boat directly. It's a beautiful ride—papa took me last summer, and I enjoyed it immensely."

So down the steps they went, and out on to the floating-pier up to which the steamboats come. One or two came up, but those were not the right ones. After waiting about five minutes, however, the Chelsea boat came dashing up.

"Now for Battersea, Vauxhall, Chelsea, and all piers up the river!"

"All right, James; jump on board!"

Accordingly, both went on board, Rodney going demurely first, James following. They took their seats just abaft the paddle-box, and Rodney, casting a glance around, saw that his plan was ripe for execution. Rising from his seat, he walked a yard or two nearer to the stern of the boat, which, at that moment, moved off from the pier.

"James," he said, "let's get out; I am afraid I shall be sea-sick."

"Nonsense, Master Rodney. We're off now."

"James, I am frightened. I am sure we shall upset, and be drowned. I shall go ashore again."

The steamboat, at this moment, was some eight feet from the pier, and moving quickly away.

As Rodney uttered the last words, he nimbly mounted the rail, and, by a vigorous leap, cleared the interval, now rapidly widening, and landed safely on the platform.

"Come on, James," he said, apparently in perfect innocence; "make haste, or you'll be too late."

The young rascal well knew that James would not dare attempt the leap. The footman started to his feet, and looked in dismay on his young master quietly standing on the platform.

Then he turned to the captain, on the bridge, and cried out—

"Hi! Mr. steamboat man, I want to get out. Make your boat go back."

"You will have to wait till we get to the next pier, my friend," replied the skipper, with a grin, "and that is Hungerford. I dare not put my boat back for nobody, when once she's started."

As the boat passed under the bridge, Rodney ran up the steps and went on top, when, looking over the parapet, he could see the deluded footman looking the picture of dismay. He called out to him—

"Good bye, James; remember me to the guv'nor, and all at home."

James knew now that he had been fooled, and said to himself, dolefully—

"I shall lose my place through letting him give me the slip—the tarnation young scapegrace."



CHAPTER V.

OUR HERO VISITS THE DOCKS, AND MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF BILLY-GO-EASY.

ROB RODNEY having thus cleverly escaped from his keeper, sat down on one of the seats of the bridge, and pulling off his right shoe, took the sixteen pounds he had borrowed from Lucy Maitland from his sock.

"Once more I'm free," he said to himself. "By the way, though, I don't think I'd better stop here. The boat calls at Hungerford Pier, and Mr. James will come pelting back ready to break his neck in hopes of finding me on the bridge—bah!"

Jumping into a Hansom, which his hail stopped, he asked the driver to take him to —— Street, not that he wished to go there, but to avoid recapture by the footman. He next set to work debating what he should do—he had determined not to go to school, and would not again return home.

The sea!—that refuge for the restless, home for the homeless—the field on which so many had won wealth and renown.

Yes, he would go to sea.

But how to set about it? That was the next question. Go down to the docks and look about, was an almost obvious answer. The docks, he knew, lay round about Blackwall; so hailing another cab, he was driven to the Blackwall Railway Station, and in an hour from the moment of his leap from the steamboat, was in the regions of tar, ship stores, sailors' boarding-houses, outfitters, and grogshops. He had on a suit of fine cloth clothes, and silk hat. These he knew were incongruous, and looked absurd in that part of the world. So he entered a small outfitter's shop, which he thought likely to suit his purpose, telling the proprietor that he wanted to buy a rough serviceable suit of clothes, and also to sell the cloth ones. When he had completed the deal he walked from the shop, looking quite a sailor, and only some three pounds lighter in pocket. Accordingly, away he started, and entering the East India Docks rather confused, he surveyed with admiration, not unmingled with a sort of awe, what, to him, seemed the great monsters of the deep—the East Indiamen of England's merchant fleet at that time lying in the docks. After having gone all round, and wondered at the scene of confusion and desolation prevailing on the decks, he made up his mind to go on board. Peering down the holds of

one or two, he discovered gangs of men, dirty and dismal-looking, working at storing or unloading the cargo.

Looking into the cabins, too, he saw nothing but desolation—an under steward in his shirt-sleeves, or a boy clearing up : such was what usually met his eyes. Several times he asked for the “captain,” and was answered with a stare that he was not on board : the ship would not sail for a week, or a fortnight, or a month, as the case might be. So he soon gave up this plan of operation, and wandered about, not knowing what on earth to do next.

Presently, however, he came to a sailor, who, seated on the head of a barrel on the wharf, opposite a ship which had her sails bent, was rolling about and singing a song, the refrain of which was—

“So let the world jog along as it will,
I’ll be free and easy still,
Free and easy,
Free and easy,
I’ll be free and easy still.”

He was much struck by the manner and appearance of the singer. Though a weather-beaten tar, apparently of some forty years, or thereabouts, his face was jolly and good-humoured as that of a chubby boy who had never seen trouble or previous hard work. There was a rollicking, happy-go-lucky look about the man which seemed to say that happen what might, he didn’t care.

Presently he stopped, and Rodney, attracted by his appearance, ventured to address him.

“Not a bad song that !”

“Bad song ! I should think not. A jolly, good song, and very well sung—merry companions every one. But it ain’t so much the song as the sentiment as pleases me. I’ve sung that song and no other this twenty year, and I don’t half know it yet.”

“Indeed,” said Rodney, laughing.

“Yes—that’s a song as wants a deal of studyin’, leastwise, to act up to it right, square, and proper.

"So let the world jog along as it will,
I'll be free and easy still."

"There's a sentiment! That's what I call a musical axiom worth knowing!"

"Do you always act up to it?" asked Rodney.

"Bet my life I do! much as I can—takes a good deal to put me out!"

Up to this time he had not looked at our hero, but now he steered round and honoured him with a good-natured stare.

"Hillo! my young freshwater shrimp; where did you come from, all togg'd out in a spick-span new suit. Out o' a bandbox, eh? Who are you? one o' Green's mid-dies—or what? No, you ain't got their art neither."

"Well, my name is Rodney, and—"

"Ah, yes, I can tell you the rest. You want to go to sea, I suppose—think it's all very fine to sit still and let the wind blow you along—catching sharks and harpooning whales—seeing waterspouts and all the other wonders of the 'nasty deep,' as I see it called in a poetry book: though why they should call it the nasty deep, I don't know, considering as its bein' clean and wholesome's about the only point in its favour."

"Not the 'nasty' deep, but the 'vasty deep,'" said Rodney, laughing.

"Well, it's all the same," continued his new acquaintance, seein' how you want to 'go down to it in ships,' though as for the matter o' that, I don't see why one shouldn't be eno'gh. You want to be a rover of the sea, all so bold—jest as I did 'bout twenty years ago. Ah! my lad, you'll find it a rough life and a hard life."

"I don't care about that," our hero put in hastily; "I don't mind being knocked about. I've had lots o' beating, and have got rather to like it than otherwise!"

This speech caused the sailor to regard Rodney more attentively.

"Come, come," he said, "that ain't so bad—you look a smartish young chap too. How old are you?"

"Fifteen and nearly three months."

"Ah! a strong-built young chap; shouldn't wonder if there wasn't some stuff in you."

"You may lay your life there is," Rodney answered, decisively.

"I like that—I like your pluck and your opinion o' yourself. If you don't believe yourself, you can't expect any one else to. Do your best—trust to luck—and take it easy: that's my motto."

After another stave of "free and easy" this curious character seemed to have an idea, and, cunningly regarding Rodney, said—

"Youngster, shouldn't be surprised you'd got some rhino. If so be I'm right, what do you say if we up stick and make for the King Billy?"

This was a celebrated sailors' house situated in Old Gravel Lane; and thither our hero and his new companion wended their way.

"You keep in tow o' me, youngster, and I'll get you safe through it. When there ain't a shot left in the locker it's time Billy-go-easy took ship again."

Rodney found his new acquaintance an exceedingly pleasant fellow—quaint, humorous, and with the usual amount of that recklessness and happy-go-lucky disposition which had probably procured for him the *sobriquet* of Billy-go-easy. When he learned from our hero that he was well supplied with money, he gave him some good advice on the subject, and yet did not forget his own interests in the way of grog.

"Now look'ee here, my lad; we are going to a sailors' grog-shop, an' as every man Jack o' 'em 'ud be willin' to spend their last copper on a shipmate or chum, they won't be shy o' lettin' you spend your rhino. If you'll take my advice you'll stow all your money away, barrin' a yellow-boy; that'll be plenty to lush 'em all up."

"Before I came away from home I concealed all my money."

"An' a rattlin' cute dodge too. I've heard tell o' the

London pickpockets, how clever they was, and how they'd steal a false tooth while you was asleep for the sake o' the gold setting ; but I'll defy all nations to take a man's boots and stockings off wi'out his knowin' it. Strikes me, young shaver, you're a knowin' card. Let's come in here, and then while I'm takin' a nobbler you can stow your coin away—leastwise, all except one yellow-boy."

Rodney gladly took this advice, and, having again deposited all his money, except a sovereign, in the sock of his right foot, he soon found himself under the protecting wing of the old sailor in the large parlour at the back of the "Jolly Sailors."

There were some dozen or so men in the room, a glance at whose rugged, weather-beaten, and bronzed faces was sufficient to show that they were deep-sea sailors—that is, who had been in the habit of sailing on long voyages and in tropical climes. Billy-go-easy proceeded to introduce our hero to the assembly in a truly characteristic manner.

"Shipmates, messmates, and chums—for though you ain't all been shipmates wi' Billy, you may, and messmates too ; anyhow, you're all chums, an' I begs permission o' all hands in this ere fo'ks'tle, starboard watch, larboard watch, and idlers, to introduce to your notice this young chap here, which he intends to be a sailor an' go to sea for pleasure."

"Thim as 'ud go to sea for pleasure 'ud go to somewhere else for pastime," cried a big, black-bearded mariner.

"Right you air, Roger, my boy. I wur a comin' to that. Now, this here young chap is jest the sort as *would* go to the place you've mentioned, and all for pastime. I ain't known him long ; but it's my d'liberate opinion that he's all there, an' if he can't sail dead in the wind's eye he can keep closer up than any square-rigged hooker in this room. So arter this short introduction o' the young feller, I ha' great pleasure in informin' the noble company as he's willin' to stand drinks all round."

This was received with a shout of applause, and Rodney, who, as the reader knows, was never remarkable for bashful-

ness or timidity, soon found himself on the best of terms with the assembled salts.

The afternoon passed pleasantly enough. Yarn succeeded yarn, and then, when Rodney had listened with pleased wonder to the "tough cutters" these sons of ocean favoured himself and each other with, some one proposed a song. One of them, a grey-bearded man of fifty years, rolled out in a deep sonorous voice of great power, an old sea song—

"Far, far upon the sea,
When the good ship's going free."

Then another sailor volunteered, and favoured the company with "*The Saucy Arcthusa*." Uproarious was the applause and deafening the chorus.

Then the company broke up, as it was six o'clock. Most of the sailors returned to their respective boarding-houses to tea, or rather supper, whence they would emerge about eight, and each seek his own diversion.

Some would repair to one of the East-end theatres; others would patronise a concert or singing-saloon; while others again, would prefer a dancing-room on the first floor of such a house as where they were then assembled.

There, to the noise of a fiddle and fife, "homeward-bound Jack," as a sailor just paid off from a voyage is called, would spend his money, muddle his brains, and, in too many instances, ruin his health.

Billy-go-easy offered to take our hero to his own boarding-house, but, for reasons of his own, Rodney declined.

"No, I shall go to the West end of London to-night. I shall visit a theatre, get a bed at some hotel, and to-morrow go and see an old schoolfellow of mine, and then come back here in the evening. I dare say I shall find you."

"You'll find me, right enough, my lad," said Billy, eyeing him curiously; "but I say, now—no offence, youngster, mind you—but—"

"But what, shipmate?" said Rodney, briskly. He now felt as though he were a full-fledged sailor, and spoke accordingly.

"Well, what I means to say is this : your're a beginning to funk, are you ? I thought that you was a right down scarer, and meant what you said, else I wouldn't ha' brought you among our lot. I don't advise you to go to sea, my lad ; though I must say if you tuk to anything else you'd spile a good sailor. Howsomever, that's neither here nor there. All I've got to say is this—If you thinks better of it 'nd rather go back, and join the ship you deserted from—"

"Ship I deserted from ? I hardly understand."

"Why the school, o' course, I means. If so be as you'd rather go back, why, go, and good luck go wi' you."

"Billy," said Rodney, offering him his hand, "I have no intention of the kind. I mean to come back and ship with you ; but first I'll go back and see a schoolfellow of mine ; he's a year older than me, and a fine fellow every way. I want to see him, have a talk with him, and ask him if he will join me. Do you know, Billy, I don't mind leaving home a bit, but I feel kind of lonesome at the thoughts of going to sea without saying good bye to Geordie Vane—Geordie, I call him—his name is George Vane, and we've always been thick friends. He's got neither father nor mother, and we've often said we'd be friends through life. Perhaps he'll come with me—perhaps he won't. Anyhow, I shall go and ask him, and say good bye."

"Ain't you afeard o' being collared again ?"

"Not a bit ; I shall be cautious, and look out for that, I can tell you. I know where to find Geordie without going near either the school or the boarding-house. Shall I find you here when I come back ?"

"You'll find me at Mother ——'s in the evening, and about the docks, where you first see me, all day. I shall be looking out for a ship, as it's time I went to sea again, considerin' as I ain't a shot left in the locker."

"Shall I lend you some before I go ?" said Rodney, eagerly ; "I can soon get it out of my sock ; besides, I must, for I've spent all the sovereign."

"Get it out, my lad, by all means ; but none for me.

No, no ! Billy-go-easy's no land-shark, nor sea-shark either. If you like to stand another glass before you go I'll drink your health."

Rodney quickly got out another sovereign, and then, after having another drain, he wished Billy good bye, appointing to meet him on the next night.

CHAPTER VI.

ONCE MORE A PRISONER.

HAVING made up his mind to see his favourite schoolfellow, George Vane, before finally taking to the sea, nothing could turn our self-willed hero from his purpose. His imagination had been inflamed and his love of adventure excited by the yarns he had heard. What he had seen of sailor men had highly impressed him in favour of the life, and he thought it could not be disagreeable, or they would not be so happy and jovial. Then, too, when he looked on the stalwart frames and healthy, bronzed complexions of the seamen, he argued that the life could not be an unhealthy or a very hard one.

And so, with his head filled, with his imagination stimulated, by the yarns he had heard, our hero resolved on a stealthy pilgrimage back to the hated school for the purpose of seeing his chum and schoolfellow, Geordie Vane, persuading him to cast in his lot with himself, if possible, and if not, at least to bid him adieu.

It was too late to think of visiting the school that night, as he knew that all the boarders would have been within doors, and of course he dared not be seen, but must trust to see his friend, and attract his attention, whilst prowling about in the dusk of the evening.

So, as he had nothing better to do, he engaged a bed at a hotel in Covent Garden.

In the morning he slept till latish, and, after breakfast, sauntered about the town, not thinking it advisable to venture in the neighbourhood of the school till dusk.

In pursuance of his design, Rodney, about five o'clock, took train from London to the neighbourhood of the school.

The distance was only some six or seven miles, so in the space of a quarter of an hour he found himself in the street of the well-remembered village, as the straggling collection of shops and houses was called by the boys. From hence he had some half-mile to walk to the school. It may well be imagined that he did not present himself at the front gates. More prudent far, he made a circuit, and getting over some palings, crossed a piece of waste land, and clambered upon the low wall which bounded the large playground.

It was a damp, misty evening, which so far favoured him as to secure him from the observation of those whom he did not wish to see. He could make out many of his school-fellows, but could not discover the one he wished to see among them.

So he hung about, watching wistfully, and hiding behind the wall whenever he saw any whom he supposed might be traitorous approach him. On several occasions boys passed quite close, and he could hear their conversation.

Still he waited and watched till the shades of evening deepened over the scene, and he began to fear that George Vane would not make his appearance or, at all events, come within hail.

The minutes passed slowly enough to our hero as he thus sat watching and waiting.

One by one and two by two the boys sauntered in from the play ground, and went towards their respective boarding-houses.

Things began to look very unfavourable.

He had made up his mind to see George.

On that he was decided, and, as there seemed no prospect of his coming, Rodney set his wits to work to devise some scheme by which he might inform him that he was about.

This dogged perseverance often stood him in good stead, but then, on the other hand, it often entailed very unfortunate consequences ; it savoured of the nature of stubbornness and obstinacy—but however, such was his disposition, and

hitherto, not having had the rough edges of his nature rubbed off by experience and contact with the hard world, he never dreamed of relinquishing that which he had undertaken.

While he was deeply pondering and endeavouring with head bent down to concoct some feasible plan he heard a quick footstep approaching, and peering out into the misty gloom, he quickly recognized the gait and figure of his friend.

"Geordie!" he cried.

Instantly the runner stopped and listened.

"Who called me?" he said, not at present discerning Rodney in the obscurity.

"I—Rodney."

"Rodney—you here? By Jove, this is a surprise."

A hearty grip of the hand signified that it was also a pleasant surprise, had not the tone and manner of the speaker been sufficient.

"I've been waiting here this hour, Geordie; I began to be afraid you would not come."

"You don't mean to say you've come back for good?"

"Come back for good!—now is it likely?—do I look like it?"—and Rodney glanced down at his sailor's togs with something very like pride.

"But where have you been?—what have you been doing?—and what are you going to do?"

"Well, old boy, you ask me so many questions that I cannot answer all at once; you must manage to come out for an hour, and then I'll tell you all I have done, and what I'm going to do."

"Very well, I can manage that, I know; that brute O'Brien is away?"

"Is he? I'm glad of that. Where is he?"

"Oh, he's gone for two days' holiday—the fact is, I believe, that your epitaph had driven him away. It's all over the school. You should have seen the towering rage he got in at the time. He knows that everybody, even the other masters, laughed at it, and is ready to die of spite."

"How long is he gone for?"

"Oh, he'll be back to-morrow, at the latest."

"Well now, where shall we meet?"

"What do you say to old Daddy Black's? We can sit in his little parlour, and be as cosy as possible."

"That'll do first rate."

"Very well, then, you go on, and I'll get leave from the second master, and follow."

And now a few words as to this young gentleman, Geordie Vane, with whom, in the course of our story, we shall meet again.

George Vane was an orphan, and had no male relations living except an uncle, who was his guardian—his father and mother had died in his infancy. The former was a general in the army at the time of his death, a man much respected, and of good property. His mother was distantly related to Parson Maitland, who had proved himself such a bitter enemy to our hero. Thus it was that the two boys knew something of each other over and above their school acquaintance.

General Vane left a good estate and a round sum of money in the funds, and having neglected to make any will, the Court of Chancery took the orphan under its fostering care, and appointed an uncle, with whom the general had not been friendly for years, as the guardian of the orphan.

Anything more impolitic or hurtful to the boy could scarcely be conceived.

True, George went home to his uncle's house for the holidays at Christmas and Midsummer; but this was no pleasure, as his harsh relative took every opportunity of wounding his nephew's sensitive nature, and altogether making his home life as unhappy and comfortless as possible.

However, George Vane was made of good stuff. He had good health, good spirits, and boundless pluck. He knew that when he should be of age he would have a fine fortune at his absolute disposal, and, till then, he resolved to rub along as best he could.

He was at this time seventeen years of age—a year older

than Rodney, and was as strapping and handsome a young fellow as one would meet in a day's walk.

In one respect he resembled Rodney. When he set his mind on an object he went straight to work to attain it, and never ceased striving till victory crowned his efforts. He was by no means so reckless or so boisterous in manner and spirits as Rodney; but, nevertheless, there existed between the two lads a strong friendship.

It has been mentioned that when he took a thing into his head, he was not to be turned away from his purpose. At the last examination for prizes he had reckoned somewhat confidently on obtaining those for Latin and Greek, and had expressed his opinion somewhat too freely, as the event proved; for in each of these subjects he failed to be first, although he stood second on the list.

Happening to hear some sneering remarks on the subject made by boys of inferior ability, who envied him his undoubted pre-eminence, he was bitterly mortified, and, before breaking up, publicly expressed his intention of carrying every prize in the class at the close of the second half of the year—that is to say, at Christmas.

French, Latin, Greek, mathematics, history, English and Latin verse—he defiantly stated that he would win every one, and challenged all his class-mates to compete with him.

With some this might have been but a foolish boast; it was not so with George Vane; and on the commencement of the half he forthwith set to work at his self-imposed task.

This brief sketch of his person and character will suffice for the present, and we will now go on to Daddy Black's, where these school friends were to meet.

Daddy Black, as he was called by the boys, kept a little ale-house not far from the school, and on the road from the station. He sold, besides ale and porter, sweets and other eatables, and freely gave credit to such of the boys at the school as he esteemed honourable and trustworthy. Rodney and George Vane were especial favourites of his, and for them, and some few others, he would have a hot potation—

a sort of spiced ale—most pleasant to the palate, and not too intoxicating.

Rodney walked into the little bar.

“Daddy,” he said, “I want to come into the little parlour at the back ; Geordie Vane’s coming directly, and we want to have a long talk over a jug of hot ale.”

“Lor ! bless my soul, Mr. Rodney ! why it ain’t never you ! Why, how you’ve been and togged yourself out ! They told me as you’d run away—made a clean bolt of it—cut the consarn altogether. I was main sorry to hear it, I tell you.”

“It’s true enough, Daddy ; but I mustn’t stand talking here. I may be seen from the street, and the news carried up to the house, and I can assure you that does not meet my views at all.”

The landlord threw open the little gate leading through the bar into the back parlour, and our hero entered. George Vane joined him in a few moments, and then Rodney, in reply to the questions of his friend, proceeded to tell him where he had been, what he had been doing, and what he intended to do. “In the first place, as to where I have been—you know when I ran away from the school the second time, I went home ?”

“Yes ; that we heard, and also that you cleverly got away from the footman whom your father sent with you to bring you back.”

“Yes, I gave him the slip capitally. Shall I tell you how I managed it ?”

“Yes, yes, let me hear all about it. He came here, looking as miserable as it was possible for a man to look, and told Williams, the second master, that he should lose his place.”

“What did he come for ?”

“To see if you had only been having a lark with him, and had come back on your own account.”

“Ha ! ha ! ha ! that’s a good one, anyhow.”

“Ha ! ha ! ha ! They didn’t know you, Rodney, old boy. Well, pelt away and tell me how you dodged him.”

Thereupon Rodney related the episode of the steamer from Waterloo Bridge, which need not be repeated to the reader.

"Well, and what then?"

"Why I made up my mind to go to sea, and started off to the docks—the East India Docks, at Blackwall."

"Hence these nautical clothes, *à la* Billy Taylor, who, the song says, 'was a smart young fellow.'"

"Now, none of your chaff, Geordie, or I won't tell you any more."

"Well, go on, I want to hear what happened next."

"The first thing I did was to go and buy these clothes, giving my own in exchange as part payment—for you see I thought a suit of black cloth and a high silk hat would look ridiculous."

"No doubt you were right, O sapient Rodney. So once more go ahead."

"Well, having rigged myself out in this suit, I started off and entered the dock gates. I wandered about for some time, and can tell you I was considerably disappointed at the dismal appearance of the ships."

"It strikes me, old fellow, you'll be a good deal more disappointed if you really persist in your determination of going to sea."

"And what if I am—shall that turn me from my purpose? Would it daunt *you*, Geordie?"

"Well, no, I don't think it would," Vane replied, quietly. "Go ahead."

"After I'd been cruising about for some time—"

"Quite nautical in our phrasology, I observe"—his friend put in, as if trying to torment him—"did you buy your sea slang with your slop clothes?"

"It's no use, Geordie, you can't vex me now—you've made me savage lots of times with that confounded quiet chaff of yours."

"Well, well, go ahead, my young commodore."

"Presently I observed a singular-looking character sitting on one of the stone pillars which they use for mooring the vessels. I saw he was a sailor at once, and as his jolly, good-

humoured countenance pleased me, I resolved to speak to him. He was singing a song, the burden of which is—

“So let the world jog on as it will,
I'll be free and easy still,
Free and easy,
Free and easy,
I'll be free and easy still.’

“He’s always singing that song, and, in consequence of that and his habits, he is nick-named by his shipmates and friends ‘Billy-go-easy.’”

“Bill-go-easy!” exclaimed Geordie, greatly amused. “What a stunning name! I hope he is worthy of it.”

“He is so; he’s the coolest fish I ever knew; good-tempered, good-natured, jolly, happy-go-lucky, independent, and honest; that’s what Billy-go-easy is, and I’d answer for it, though I haven’t known him two days.”

“And, so, under the wing of your easy-going friend, you mean to go to sea, I suppose?”

“Well, you are right there.”

“I tell you what it is, old boy,” George Vane said, all at once; “I feel inclined to follow your example, throw up this humdrum school life, and go to sea myself.”

“That’s the very thing,” cried Rodney in high glee. “I knew you would. You shall start off with me this very night. We’ll have a rare time of it, I promise you. Wait till you see Billy-go-easy; you’ll be delighted with him. What do you say—will you start?”

“My dear old boy, it’s impossible,” said George Vane, gravely. “I won’t chaff any more, but speak quite seriously. I don’t mind owning that, like yourself, I am tired of this useless, monotonous life. I know right well that all this Latin and Greek with which I am cramming myself is bosh. In all probability, when I leave school and college (if ever I go to college), I shall never open a Greek or Latin book again. I know that there is no use in all this; but still, for a time at least, I must go on.”

“For a time! what do you mean? For how long?”

“Till Christmas, at all events. After then I am my own

master. I can go to college if I choose, and take my degree within three years. Not that I have by any means decided to do so."

"But why are you not your own master before Christmas as after?"

"What! you mean to say you don't know?" replied Vane, with a sober smile.

"Yes; that I certainly do."

"Don't you know that I mean to win every prize in the class? I said so publicly."

"And is that all?"

"Ah, is it not enough! I am surprised at you, Rodney. I thought you were a sort of fellow who, when once you had made up your mind to a thing, would unflinchingly carry it out."

"You are right, Geordie," replied our hero, abashed; "but I'm sorry for it all the same."

"Sorry for what?"

"That you have made up your mind to win all the prizes."

"Why, don't you think I shall succeed?"

"Oh, yes! it's not that. I believe you will succeed in everything you undertake; but I am sorry because I hoped that you would have come with me."

"And so am I sorry, old fellow. I swear that, though I have been pretending to laugh at you and make fun, all the time I feel inclined to go with you; but I can't."

"No, you can't—of course not," replied Rodney, ruefully. "I shall go alone, and don't suppose I shall ever see you again."

"Nonsense—we shall meet again."

"How, when, and where?"

These three short queries set Geordie Vane thinking. He remained intently staring on the ground for some little time, Rodney all the while watching with the anxious look of an affectionate dog.

"How, when, and where! Well, I tell you, Rodney, that those three questions puzzled me a good deal; but I can answer them now."

“Can you?”

“First let me ask you—are you fully determined to adopt a seafaring life—to take it rough and smooth for years?”

“I am,” was the ready response.

“Well, suppose I were to make an appointment for a rendezvous, say four years from this date, would you keep it?”

“I would; I will swear it, old fellow.”

“You see, Rodney, I don’t know exactly what I shall do yet. I may go to Oxford, or I may not. If once I undertake to get my degree, I shall do it; but that I can do in less than three years. I do believe that if I hadn’t said I’d win all these prizes I should come with you now. However, that is impossible.”

“Well, then, what about this meeting four years hence? I should like to see you again, Geordie.”

“And so you shall, if I’m alive, and you’re alive and willing.”

“When is it to be—and where?”

“As to when,” replied George Vane, after thinking for a moment or two, “in four years from this time.”

“But where, Geordie?”

“Ah! now I’m puzzled. Where shall we say? California—India—Australia? Anywhere!”

“Australia, if anywhere. I think I should like to go to the diggings some day, when I’m big enough and strong enough, you know.”

“Australia be it then. But where in that little continent?”

“I don’t know. Where you like.”

“Do you know any place in Australia by name? A seaport is best, you know.”

“Sydney is the capital of New South Wales.”

“That will do; Sydney, the ‘Queen of the South,’ they call the town.”

“But where can we appoint to meet in Sydney?”

“Let me see. Do you know any public building—by name, even?”

"No, I don't."

"Is there a theatre there?"

"Yes—yes. I remember Billy-go-easy said something about it. There are two theatres—the principal one is called the Victoria Theatre, and it's in Pitt Street, I remember that."

"Very well, then; the Victoria Theatre, Pitt Street, Sydney, New South Wales."

"And the time?"

"After the conclusion of the first piece if the theatre is open. If it is not, outside at ten o'clock, precisely."

"Four years to-day. Let's have an almanac, and calculate what day that will be."

"I've got one in my memorandum-book."

Producing this, he found the day of the month, and each made a note of it.

"And I'll tell you what, Rodney," said George Vane; "when we meet we'll agree each to tell the best story, the toughest yarn, about our adventures. I expect you'll beat me at it if you go on as you have to-night."

"Yes, I'm agreed; and if I'm alive I'll be at the rendezvous. Four years, that's a long time."

"All the better," replied Vane, carelessly; "we shall have the more to tell each other; mind you have a rattling good adventure, Rodney."

"And you really mean to keep your tryst?"

"On my word and honour, as the son of an English gentleman, I will be in Sydney in less than the time agreed on."

"What changes may have taken place by that time!" said Rodney, who could not keep his spirits up—for a wonder; "why, we may be both dead."

"Nonsense; don't talk like that. We shall meet all right, I daresay; and then won't we have a jolly lark!"

The clock struck nine at this moment, and thereupon George Vane started up.

"By Jove! I must be off, old fellow. Prayers at a quarter-past nine, and I don't want to get into disgrace—

not that I'm afraid, you know," he added, proudly, "but I mean to win these prizes."

"I'll come with you to the gate," said Rodney.

Arrived at the gate, they held each other's hands, and bade each other farewell for four years.

"Good bye, old fellow. God bless you!"

"Good bye, Geordie. I must make haste, and I shall catch the half-past nine train."

His voice quivered strangely, and, had there been more light, his chum might have seen a tear stealing down his cheek.

"Good bye, once more."

"Good bye," replied Rodney, this time with an unmistakeable gulp.

"Not so fast, my fine fellow. I've caught you again, have I? Tampering with the other scholars. I suppose you didn't think to see me, did you?"

It was O'Brien, who, in company with the writing-master, had approached quite close without either hearing them, so rapt were our two young friends in their long farewell-taking.

Resistance was useless. As he spoke, O'Brien pushed Rodney inside the gate, and held him fast by the collar.

Both were strong men, and our hero had sufficient sense to see that to struggle would only be to put him to greater humiliation.

"Mr. O'Brien," he said, "loose my collar; I will go with you—I give you my word of honour!"

"Ha, ha!—likely thing! Let you go, eh!"

"I tell you I will come with you. I give you my word."

"Mr. O'Brien, you must loose his collar."

"Oh, indeed, Mr. Vane, and at your orders! Perhaps you can enforce them!"

O'Brien did not expect so vigorous a demonstration as Rodney's friend made. There was a garden rake and a spade standing against the gate on the inside.

Vane seized the spade.

"Yes, I will ! Loose his collar, Frederick O'Brien, or, as sure as you're an Irishman, I'll break your head with this shovel."

Now Vane was a powerful fellow, young as he was, and, with such a weapon, was quite capable of carrying out his threat, if he was so minded. And that he would be so minded O'Brien thought possible.

"Well, you young cub, if you'll walk with me quietly into the house, I'll let go your collar."

"Don't call me a cub, you—"

"Hush ! that will do, Rodney, for the present. Don't commit yourself by returning his abuse."

With a very ill grace, O'Brien, who never could forgive the affair of the ink-pot and the epitaph, released our hero's collar, and, faithful to his word, he walked quietly into the boarding-house.

Once more a prisoner ! Unlucky Rodney Ray !

CHAPTER VII.

RODNEY HITS ON A PLAN OF ESCAPE.

THE second master, Mr. Williams, was disposed to deal leniently with our hero, and so expressed himself. He was quite willing, he said, to accept his word of honour not to escape. But Rodney stubbornly refused.

"Very well ; then I have no alternative but to confine you in a room by yourself. I hope, however, that you will think better of it by the morning."

Rodney, however, remained obstinate, and positively refused to make any promise of the kind. He was consigned to a room at the top of the house, and there locked in. But before going to bed the second master again visited him, and endeavoured, in every possible way, to persuade him to promise that he would remain quietly, and not attempt to escape.

He had but one answer.

"No, I will not promise ; you can do what you please."

So he was locked up. Unwilling, however, to be unnecessarily harsh, Mr. Williams sent up his boxes, and told him that he might change his absurd costume in the morning, in order that he might not be an object of ridicule to the other boys.

This, however, only incensed Rodney the more, and he determined to escape, or break his neck in the attempt.

When left to himself he quickly set about devising how this should be accomplished. The room was at the top of the house, and the window looked out on a courtyard surrounded by high walls, so that even if he could manage to descend, he would be little better off.

He resolved to attempt it, however, and had decided to tear the sheets and blankets in strips, when Mr. O'Brien, his hated enemy, entered, and without a word took away his boots.

Here was a dilemma indeed !

He sat on the edge of his bed, and thought and thought till his head ached as to how he could possibly escape barefooted.

A voice at the door—only a whisper, it is true, but he recognized it.

"Rodney ! Rodney !"

It was George Vane, who had come quietly up with glad news.

"Yes, Geordie."

"My room is right under yours. If you can manage to get down to the sill of the window, I will leave it open."

"Who's in the room with you ?"

"Only Tommy Dutton."

"Have you got your boots ? They've taken mine away."

"Yes," was the whispered reply.

Then Rodney set deliberately to work, and commenced making a cord from the sheets. He was very cautious how he set about it, for he knew not at what moment one of the masters might come in to see if he was all safe.

He first took the under sheet, and twisted it up into a rope about eight feet long, which he felt certain was strong enough to bear his weight. Then, after listening awhile, to be sure that all was quiet, he did the same by the other, and had now sixteen feet nearly of rope, more than sufficient to bear his weight and land him on the window-sill below.

He knew every inch of the house, and as the room underneath was not locked, he felt quite certain he could escape with ease.

But, before he went, there flashed across his mind the recollection of a piece of mischief—a foolish frolic which he had once played off on George Vane when he was visiting at his father's house.

Among Rodney's boxes was a small chemical chest full of apparatus, &c., with which he was very fond of experimenting. From this he took a small wire "tripod," or stand, and a spirit-lamp, which was all ready filled and ready for use. Belonging to the tripod was a circular tin dish, about the size of a small saucer, and which was used for drying any compound to be experimented on; also to fill with sand to make a sand bath.

Said Rodney to himself, "If I can only find a cruets of cayenne pepper in the kitchen, I can take a noble and signal revenge on Mr. O'Brien."

So, intent on this, he put the tripod, dish, and spirit-lamp, carefully in his pocket, and commenced the descent.

It was not particularly perilous to a lad accustomed to athletic sports, and a good climber, and in half a minute he stood on the window-ledge of the room in which slept his friend Vane.

Scarcely had he landed safely than the window was quietly opened, and he stepped in.

It did not take him long to try on his chum's boots, which fitted him tolerably.

"Now, Geordie, old boy, you lay awake a bit. Before I make a clean bolt I mean to have a game with O'Brien. He called me a young cub, and I'll serve him out for it,"

Geordie Vane cautioned him, and begged him to be care-

ful ; but Rodney was intent upon his contemplated piece of mischief.

Once more they said farewell—each again promising to keep the romantic rendezvous at so long a date.

Rodney, carrying the boots in his hand, made his way to the kitchen, safely and noiselessly ; then he struck a light, and soon found what he wanted—a cruet of cayenne pepper.

He knew every room and passage in the house well, and had no difficulty in finding his way to the two rooms occupied by the third master, the obnoxious O'Brien. The outer room of these two Mr. O'Brien used as a study, and the door was ajar. The sleeping-room, in which Rodney's enemy lay all unconscious, opened from this. The door was closed ; but he knew that would not interfere with his design.

Cautiously striking a match, he lit the spirit-lamp, and placed it under the tripod, on which was the circular tin saucer. This done, he waited till this dish got quite hot, and then emptied the cayenne pepper on to it.

His next proceeding was to place the whole affair out of sight, which he managed by concealing it behind a window curtain. Then he went out, first taking the key and locking the door behind him.

In ten minutes' time he was once again free, and waited in the road to see the effect of what he had done. From the position he took up he could command a view of Mr. O'Brien's window, and had not long to wait before he perceived the effect of the cayenne. First he saw a light, and then the window was thrown open. This, however, did not have the desired effect of removing the irritating fumes of the cayenne ; and, after running about in a bewildered manner for a time, the victim commenced shouting at the top of his voice—"Fire ! fire ! fire ! Help ! Fire !"

Rodney laughed and shouted with delight as he watched his enemy running about in helpless confusion. He was locked in, and could not escape by the door, nor could he discover the cause of the suffocating vapour, which he put down to the house being on fire. Soon Rodney saw lights in all the other windows, and in five minutes all the household was

aroused, windows were thrown open, servant-girls screamed ; he could hear Geordie Vane's merry laughter, and saw him at the window. But the prominent figure of all was Mr. O'Brien, in night-cap and bed-gown, red in the face, half-choked by the suffocating vapour of the cayenne, and vociferating at the top of his voice, " Fire ! fire ! fire ! "

" I think it's time I was off now," Rodney said to himself as he observed a crowd begin to gather round the supposed fire, and accordingly he sauntered carelessly away, and was soon safe enough.

There was no possibility of getting to town that night by train, as it was long past twelve. Neither did our hero think it advisable to remain in the neighbourhood, for he knew of course that his escape, and the mischievous trick he had played on O'Brien, would quickly be discovered.

So he resolved to walk up to London, and get a bed at the same hotel where he had slept on the previous night.

Just as he was saying farewell to George Vane, the latter placed in his pocket a piece of paper, which he said was a memorandum of the rendezvous in three years and four months' time.

Rodney afterwards discovered that it contained, carefully wrapped up, two sovereigns and a half. He had forgotten or neglected to tell his friend that he was well supplied with money, and, naturally, George had given him all he had.

After a walk of more than three hours Rodney Ray arrived at Covent Garden, London, where the vegetable carts from all the market gardens in the suburbs had already congregated for the day's supply of the city of smoke. Right glad was he to get to bed—tired out by excitement and fatigue.

He slept well into the following day, and it was not till almost three in the afternoon that he again wended his way eastward. For a time he felt low and dull, a most unusual reaction having set in ; but he soon regained his wonted high spirits, and as he entered the East India Docks felt inclined to laugh at the adventures of the night. Sauntering round, he passed the same vessels, which looked exactly in the same dismal, dirty, forlorn condition.

He was scarcely prepared, however, to see the same Billy-go-easy seated on the same stone pillar, and singing the self-same song.

Right cordial was the greeting he received—

"Splinter me, youngster, if I didn't think you'd been and gone and slipped your cable, and made a clean bolt of it. I'm glad to see your face again, I am. So, my lad, let's come and have a liquor up, and drink success to everybody."

Rodney, as well pleased as the other at the meeting, willingly consented, and Billy-go-easy, jumping from his perch, followed him.

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY-GO-EASY GIVES RODNEY SOME ADVICE ON THINGS IN GENERAL.

As they walked together towards the grog-shop where Rodney's new acquaintance proposed having what he called a "tot of grog," the sailor thus addressed him—

"So you've made up your mind to go to sea, young shaver?"

"I have, and mean to go," was the decided reply.

"And may I make so bold as to ask what for?"

"What for?" said our hero, somewhat taken aback; "why, because I want to go, and I don't know what else to do; because it's a roving, adventurous life, and I want to see the world."

"Ay, ay, that's the way wi' all you youngsters—like young bears, got all your sorrows to come; I was the same myself once—thought it a fine thing to go to sea, my head full o' pirates and buccaneers, and rovers o' the ocean. But I found my mistake. Thirty year I've had o' it, man and boy, and here I am, a battered old hulk, on'y fit to be broken up, an' without a shot in my locker. Them as would go to sea for pleasure, my lad, might as well go to the d—— for pastime."

"How is it, then," asked Rodney, "that you have followed the life so long?"

"Well, you see, I am an easy-goingsort o' cove, when once I starts on a thing I don't back out. I'm a happy-go-lucky card; when I'm turned into my bunk, I don't care about turning out; when I'm on deck, I don't hanker to go below, as some do; when I'm at sea, I don't hanker to go ashore; an' when I'm ashore, I don't hanker to go to sea again. You may lay your life I takes things easy—rough and smooth, just as they come."

"Well, perhaps that's the best way; but where are we bound to?—we've passed two or three public-houses."

"We're a-bound to the 'King Billy' in Old Gravel Lane, my lad—the shanty as the song sings about—

"Oh! come to the "William,"
Make haste to the "William"—
Bear a hand to "King Billy,"
In Old Gravel Lane.'"

Thus singing, Billy-go-easy rolled along in the road for some distance, and having finished the ditty, of which there were some dozen verses, he again bore up to our hero.

"Say, youngster, how do you mean shipping?—afore the mast or through the cabin-windows, brass-bound—all brag, swagger, and gilt buttons?"

Rodney did not quite understand him at the time, but since learned that going aboard through the cabin-windows meant as a midshipman, and the term brass-bound alluded to the gold band which these young butterflies of the merchant service wear round their caps.

"Well, I hardly know. What do you advise me, Billy-go easy?" asked Rodney, boldly.

"Well, look here, young shaver, if you want a pretty easy time o' it, with nothing to do much but strike the bell and call the mates when it's their watch, you just go as midshipman; but if you want to learn the trade—to twist, splice, hand, reef, and steer—never you mind the cabin-windows, but crawl in through the hawse-holes."

"Crawl in through the hawse-holes?"

"Ay, my lad; that means go afore the mast as a fore-castle boy."

"Well," replied Rodney, "I think you are right. I

would rather go before the mast ; besides, if I wanted, I couldn't go as a midshipman, as I haven't money enough."

"Reason No. 2 settles it," said Billy, sententiously ; "right you are, my lad—clipper-built, A 1, copper-bottomed, shipshape, and Bristol fashion."

All this was Greek to our hero, who, however, forbore to display his ignorance by asking questions.

"Look at me, now ; they call me Billy-go-easy, an' as often as not I ships as that, and so signs my name in the books. I've bin thirty year at sea, man and boy, come Monday. I've bin rammed, jammed, and slammed—on deck, aloft, and below. I've bin thumped, kicked, and licked, till I thought I hadn't got a whole bone in my body. I've fell from aloft on deck—fell from on deck down the hold—fell from the yard-arm into the sea—cast away twice—nigh drowned once—Yaller Jack once—a jungle fever twice. I've bin starved wi' hunger—parched wi' thirst—scorched wi' heat—friz by cold—lived on salt horse, stinking water, and mouldy biscuit—sometimes nothing to eat and no water—ship smashed up by icebergs—swallered up by a waterspout—run agin rocks—nigh chawed up by sharks—bin sunk—bin blowed up—bin everything pretty nigh—an' here I am now, not dead yet, which my name's Billy-go-easy

A.B., Now if that ain't a scarer, I don't know what is."

"I should think it was, indeed," said Rodney, laughing ; "but it shan't scare me."

"Mind you," he added, "I couldn't ha' done it if I hadn't took things easy. When I was in all them ere predicaments, what do yer think was my motto ?"

"Can't say," replied our hero, though he could form a shrewd guess as to what was coming.

"Why, 'Free and easy,' to be sure, my lad."

And then out rolled the stave again—

"So let the world jog on as it will,

I'll be free and easy still,

Free and easy,

Free and easy,

I'll be free and easy,"

&c., &c., &c.

When he had reeled off enough of this, his favourite ditty, the old salt again addressed Rodney—

"Ay, ay, my lad, I was just like yer thirty year ago. I thought it 'ud be a fine thing to go to sea! Such an easy life! Nothing to do but sit still and let the wind blow yer along. But I foud out my mistake, an' here I am, over forty year of age, a reg'lar old hulk, and not a shot in the locker."

"Never you mind, Billy-go-easy. I've got a few pounds left. I dare say you can help me spend 'em."

"No, splinter me if I does," said the old sailor, energetically; "what few pounds you've got you keep, or else lay out in a chest o' clothes. If yer like, I'll put yer in the way of it."

"I shall be much obliged to you, I'm sure," said Rodney.

"Come along then, I'll take you to a store where I deals myself, that is to say, when I've got any money. It's kept by a Jew, and he's the honestest old thief I've met this many a day."

At this Rodney laughed aloud, and following the sailor, Rodney entered a low, dingy shop, with but little to recommend it on the outside, certainly. But he was inclined to act on the advice of his new acquaintance, who impressed him very favourably. His rugged, honest, and good-tempered features, his rough speech and yet kindly manner, all made him well disposed to the old sailor.

"Now then, old Devilskin! crawl out o' yer shell, you old snail, you, do!" This was the salutation with which Billy-go-easy saluted the proprietor.

Rodney expected to see a hook-nosed old Jew. What, then, was his astonishment, when a young girl of fifteen or sixteen, but precocious-looking for her age, glided quietly forth from behind a pile of cloth goods, and with admirable self-possession said, in tones which struck Rodney as being singularly sweet—

"Father is out. I'm in charge of the shop. What can I do for you?"

Billy-go-easy was quite flabbergasted at the appearance of a pretty girl. Like many a brave man, he would sooner

storm a battery or face a hurricane than the artillery of a girl's bright eyes. Billy-go-easy was essentially shy in regard to women, and treated them as though they were delicate toys, and he was afraid of breaking them.

CHAPTER IX.

LEAH, THE JEWISH MAIDEN.

WE said the girl was pretty, but certainly that adjective does not suffice. She was undoubtedly beautiful. Hers was a beauty of that dark Eastern type seldom seen except among the daughters of Judah—large black eyes, soft and melting usually, but which at times would flash with sudden fire—a face oval and clear-skinned, surrounded by a profusion of beautiful dark hair, which fell in wild luxuriance over her shoulders—features well formed, and a figure tall and unusually developed for her age. Such was Leah, the only daughter of old Reuben Jacobs.

Our hero Rodney was by no means abashed, as was the old sailor.

"I beg your pardon, young lady," he said, "on my own behalf and that of my friend, who is somewhat rough in his manner. We came to make a few purchases. As your father is not in, perhaps we had better call again."

The slightly angry look in her face and eyes which had followed Billy-go-easy's rude salutations, faded away as our hero spoke, and a bright smile irradiating her countenance, she said—

"Oh, sir, I can serve you as well as my father."

"Indeed," urged Rodney, "I think we had better call again; I do not like giving you the trouble."

"Indeed, sir, it is no trouble. I hope you will not go away. Besides, my father would be angry with me if he thought I frightened customers away from the shop."

"Frighten them away!" cried Rodney, impetuously; "by Jove, I should think he could not have a greater attraction!"

The girl smiled, and replied—

"At all events, the attraction does not seem to have much power, for you are the only customers who have been in since father went away in the morning."

"That's because you don't show yourself, young lady," Rodney replied promptly. "I'll wager that, if you were to clear the window, and sit down near it, so that passers-by could see you, you would soon have plenty of customers in."

"I'm afraid you are a flatterer," she replied, "and I hate flatterers."

She might hate flatterers, but it was sufficiently obvious that she had no great aversion to flattery.

"Will your father be long, miss?" Billy-go-easy now asked, recovering courage as he witnessed the easy self-possession of his *protégé*.

"He went out this morning, and will not be back till late at night."

"Suppose we proceed to business, then," said Rodney, who felt wonderfully inspired by the bright eyes of the Jewish damsel.

"What is it you want, sir?" the girl asked, addressing Rodney, and quite ignoring the presence of the sailor.

"Well, I hardly know," he replied; "I want a rig out of some kind, but I must ask my friend here to help me in choosing. I am going to sea, and as I have never been before, I don't know what I ought to buy."

"Going to sea!" exclaimed the young girl, opening her great black eyes; "what a pity!"

"A pity!" cried Rodney, sharply; "and why, pray? Isn't the life of a sailor a noble, a brave, and an adventurous one?"

"I don't know anything about their life at sea, sir," she replied, in a somewhat colder tone; "but I can't say much for their goings on ashore."

Leah, after regarding our scapegrace attentively for a moment or two, went on—"You require an outfit suitable for a midshipman, I suppose?"

"Not a bit of it—I am going before the mast to learn profession."

The girl looked surprised, and a trifle disappointed, whereat Rodney did not know whether to be pleased or not. It was clear she took some interest in him, or she would have cared neither one way nor the other. So he said—

“Yes, before the mast—there is nothing derogatory in the son of a gentleman learning to be a sailor in the right way, is there, young lady?”

“Oh! you are a gentleman, then?” she said, with charming *naïveté*.

“Of course I am,” he replied, proudly; “don’t I look like one?”

“I didn’t say you did not,” she replied, laughing; “but what do your friends say to your going before the mast with the common sailors?”

Bill-go-easy did not look very well pleased at the term “common sailors,” but, however, said nothing.

“I didn’t ask their advice,” replied our hero; “my views and my father’s did not agree, so I resolved to go and seek my fortune.”

“Seek your fortune!” the girl said; “and do you think to make a fortune at sea?”

“No, I don’t, but I don’t see why I shouldn’t. I’ve heard of boys coming up to London, with a shilling in their pockets, and dying with hundreds of thousands. Now, when I came to London, I had seventeen pounds, and have got most of it left now. Why, then, should not I make my fortune if I wish?”

“Did your father give you the money to come to London with?”

“No, he did not give me a halfpenny. I borrowed it from a young lady.”

“She must have been very fond of you to lend you seventeen pounds,” replied the Jewish maiden, who had a due appreciation of the value of money.

“So she was.”

Leah Jacobs coloured up, and said—

“And do you mean to say that a boy like you has a sweetheart?”

"I didn't say so ; but if I had I don't see any more harm in it than that a girl like you should have a lover," he answered, saucily.

"Who said I had a lover ? who dared say such a thing of me ?" she cried, her dark eyes flashing angrily, a bright flush on her cheek.

Rodney laughed, and then regarded her with undisguised admiration. He had unbounded assurance and self-possession, and, so far from being abashed, said, coolly—

"By Jove ! how handsome you look when you're angry ! you ought to be always in a rage."

This quiet effrontery quite conquered her momentary rage, and, naturally a good-natured girl, she too laughed.

"I think you're a very impertinent, audacious young fellow," she said, "and you ought to be ashamed of yourself, talking to a girl in the way you do. The idea ! a boy like you !" and as she spoke she turned her head and affected to curl her pretty lip.

"The idea ! a girl like you !" retorted Rodney. "Come, now, I'll bet that I'm older than you, although I know you look the elder ; but then girls always do ; I'm sure Lucy looks eighteen."

"Who's Lucy ?" asked the Jewish maiden, sharply.

"Aha !" said Rodney, cunningly, for he was an acute observer, though so young, and noticed the sharp, jealous accent in which she spoke ; "that's telling."

"Oh ! I'm sure I don't want to pry into your secrets or love affairs."

At this he laughed aloud. Love affairs ! He had never thought of such a thing before ; and now this girl spoke of it as a matter-of-course thing ; but then, he argued, these Jewesses are so precocious.

The girl was now very much annoyed, and observed—

"Come, sir, I presume you did not come here to laugh at me. What is it you require ?—let us do business."

"My dear young lady, I should be most happy to do so, but unfortunately at this moment I am helpless as a ship without a rudder. My guide, my Mentor, on whose advice

I depend in selecting my outfit, has, I observe, stepped over to the public-house opposite, and is at the present moment doubtless drinking to your bright eyes with a shipmate whom he caught passing—in the very best West India rum. It's very unfortunate ; but what can I do ? It is very stupid staring at each other without speaking, I propose we talk."

His manner—impudent, audacious even—took the girl's fancy, and charmed away her anger in spite of herself.

"You are a very rude, saucy young gentleman to talk to me like that, and deserve to have your ears boxed."

Rodney hereupon took off his cap, bowed humbly, and approached his face to her.

"Granted, charming maiden ; willingly will I undergo punishment for my crime from such fair hands ; 'twill scarce be punishment at all."

Leah could not help laughing again ; seeing that he had got her in good humour, he said—

"Well, about age now ; I was going to bet you that you were not older than myself."

"How absurd to bet about such a thing !"

"Well, but why not be absurd ? we've nothing else to do. Come, what do you say ? I'll bet you—I'll bet you—let me see, what shall I bet you ? I know ; I'll bet you a kiss—come, that will do, won't it ?"

"The idea !" the young lady said, scandalized.

"Idea ! yes, a very good idea. I'll tell you how old I am first, eh ?"

"Well, go on ; but mind, I shan't pay if I lose."

"Oh, yes you will ! you're too honourable not to pay your debts of honour, I'm sure."

"Am I, indeed ? You seem to know all about it."

"Well, then, I'll tell you first how old I am. This is June, isn't it ? I'm sixteen in September."

"And I'm sixteen next month ! so you see I've won, Mr. Impudence."

She leaned forward over the counter, laughing and clapping her hands.

Rodney was not slow to avail himself of the opportunity.

"You shan't say that I don't pay my debts of honour promptly," he said, and then, before she could draw back, kissed her lips.

Quick as lightning the young lady fetched him a sound box on the ear, whereat he only laughed.

"Quite fair," he said, "a smack for a smack. I'll take a dozen at the same price."

She laughed through her blushes. It was impossible to be angry with him, and she felt it.

CHAPTER X.

BLACK-BALL BOB.

JUST at this moment Billy-go-easy and an old chum of his, having each finished a stiff glass at the grog-shop opposite, came across the road. They could see into the shop as they approached it, and witnessed the episode of the kiss promptly paid by Rodney as a debt of honour.

"Well I'm blowed!" exclaimed Billy-go-easy, "if that ain't the oudacousest young rip as ever I met! Did you see that, Bob, old chum?"

"I did so; right smart and quick the young chap did it—no shuffling about nor hanging in stays."

"Let's come over and have another liquor-up—what say, Bob?"

"Right you are, my hearty."

And the two again adjourned to the public-house from which they had just emerged, leaving our hero and Miss Leah Jacobs to a little longer *tête-à-tête*.

"You see that, didn't you, Bob, my boy?" repeated Billy-go-easy.

"I did so," was the reply once more.

"Mark my words, that young chap's got stuff in him. He's a-going to sea—slipped his anchor and run away from harbour without bothering about clearance papers."

"Ah, ah ! bolted from home—I see, so did I—fifteen years ago."

"Well, Bob," pursued Billy, "I tell you that young chap's 'all there.' He'll make a smart sailor—an' he'll be a rum customer wherever he goes. I'm a-going to see him shipped aboard the *Windsor Castle*, Captain Scott. I'm going to ship in that hooker myself. What say, Bob, d'ye feel inclined for a twelvemonth's voyage in the old hooker ? a good skipper and good owners—I know her of old—a comfortable, homely sort o' ship."

"Well, you see, I shouldn't mind, but I've only just come off a ten months' cruise ; only paid off yesterday, an' I've got close on twenty pounds left yet ; can't spend it all at once, you know, old shipmate."

"Right you are, chum ; but this ship don't sail for a week anyhow, an' you can manage it in that time ; I'll help you through w'it."

"Thank you, old chum," said Black-ball Bob, or Bob the Blazer, as he was sometimes called ; "I know you will, and feels grateful accordin.' As you say she don't go for a week, I'm blessed if I ain't a good mind to ship. Where's she layin' ?"

"West India Dock—South Basin."

"I'll go down an' have a look at her to-morrow. Hava's to you, old chum."

"Same to you, and many of 'em."

Then down went two half-tumblers of raw rum, which each swallowed without a wink of the eye.

"That lad's all there, I tell you, Bob. He's a 'scarer' an' no mistake, mark my words."

A "scarer" was a favourite expression of Billy-go-easy's. Not that he attached any definite meaning to it, but he liked the word, and accordingly interlarded his conversation with it most liberally.

A few words here about Black-ball Bob, or Bob the Blazer. He was a very different character indeed from Billy-go-easy, and yet, though so dissimilar, they were great friends. A better-hearted fellow never breathed ; nevertheless, he had

his little faults ; one of those was to spend every halfpenny of money, even to his month's advance when he shipped again. Frequently he would join a fresh ship without chest, bag, or hammock—nothing but what he stood up in.

"I say, shipmates, this cove's got no togs. The cursed boarding-house keeper has stuck to 'em for his bill ; get up a little subscription for poor Bob," he would say.

Poor Bob was a lithe fellow, five feet eleven—limbs like oak saplings, and weighing some fourteen stone. So invariably it happened that poor Bob was rigged out ; even old Black-ballers contributing something towards so redoubtable a member of the fraternity. Now this was, of course, very wrong on the part of Bob the Blazer. His only excuse could be that when he had money anybody might share it with him, messmate or shipmate—A.B. or ordinary seaman.

CHAPTER XI.

RODNEY AND "THE PELICAN."

RODNEY was still talking with the pretty Jewess, neither of them seeming to tire of each other's company, but, on the contrary, improving their acquaintance at a great rate, when Black-ball Bob and Billy-go-easy entered the shop.

"What cheer, my hearty ?" And with the words Bob fetched our hero a slap on the back which shook his whole frame.

"A friend o' mine, my lad ; an old shipmate," put in Billy-go-easy, apologetically. "Hope he didn't hurt you. He's as strong as a bull elephant, and don't know it."

Rodney did not answer for a moment or two—the wind was fairly knocked out of him.

"No, he didn't hurt me," he said, presently ; "but I must say he astonished me a bit. I thought at first some one had hit me with a sledge-hammer."

Miss Leah Jacobs regarded our Black-ball friend with undisguised anger. Perhaps she was annoyed at her *tête-à-*

~~She~~ with our handsome young hero being so rudely broken in upon. Perhaps it was that she did not like her father's shop being thus unceremoniously and boisterously invaded. Whatever might have been the cause, she did not fail to show it.

"What can I do for you, sir?" she asked, with charming haughtiness, of the red-shirted, big-booted, rollicking sailor, who towered above herself, Rodney, and Billy-go-easy equally.

"Do for me, my beauty? Splinter me if I know. What would you like to do?" was the rough-and-ready reply.

"Do you require anything," she asked, "in the way of outfit? If you will wait a few moments I will attend to you. At present this young gentleman is giving his orders.

"Ha! ha! ha! Giving his orders, eh? Seems to me they're very agreeable orders. Do I require anything, you say?—yes I do; lots o' things; but I ain't likely to get everything I want, it strikes me."

"I mean, sir, do you want to purchase anything in this shop?" she asked, sharply, her eyes now flaming with anger; for she was a fiery-tempered little damsel, this Jewish maiden. "If you do not, perhaps you will allow me to transact my father's business, and not interfere with his customers."

But Bob was not to be put out of temper, and only laughed again.

"Tell you what it is, my gal, you're as tidy a little craft as ever I clapped eyes on, an' you on'y want a good skipper at your helm to steer clear o' a good many flash yachts at our stern."

This was rather ambiguous, and thereupon pretty Leah flew into a towering rage.

"Go out of my shop this instant, you low sailor-man! How dare you talk to me like that—how dare you?—Mister, sir"—appealing to Rodney—"do turn him out, or kill him, or something."

The idea of a stripling like our hero turning out the brawny six-foot sailor was so ludicrous that neither of the

three could help laughing. Billy-go-easy roared aloud. He was glad of a little slice of quiet revenge on the pretty Jewess for her expression "common sailor," as applied to his class. As for Black-ball Bob, he roared from sheer jollity and good-humour, while Rodney laughed too, though, by turning his back, he succeeded in hiding it from the fair custodian of the shop.

"Come on, Bob," said Billy-go-easy; "let's go over and have another drain opposite, and then we'll cruise down to the 'King Billy.'"

"Aye, let's come and have a drain," put in Rodney, who saw that things were getting unpleasant. "I'm as thirsty as a fish."

Not without some little difficulty, Bob, who felt inclined to have a bit of fun with the pretty, fiery-tempered Jewess, was persuaded to go away.

Rodney, after drinking a glass of ale, with his two companions, now managed to slip away in order to say good-bye to Leah, and tell her that he would call on the next day about his outfit. He found her in tears—partly from anger at the big sailor's laughing at her, and partly, he flattered himself, because he had gone without bidding her adieu. In the one short hour in which they had been left alone together he had made wonderful progress in her affections.

It was not fair, however.

She was, though in years a mere girl, yet in thought and feeling much older than he. She had taken a violent fancy to the handsome young sailor that was to be; and though by nature proud, she could not conquer the feeling she entertained for this boy. He, on his part, however, looked on the affair only as a joke. He admired her as a very pretty girl, it is true; but certainly would not have broken his heart if he was informed he was destined never to see her again. Still, however, he felt flattered by her obvious liking for him; and partly from this, and partly from a pure love of mischief and adventure, Rodney, as the saying is, "kept the game alive."

So, it will be observed, that while she was serious, and

thought he had taken as great a fancy to her as she had to him, it was not so by any means—that is to say, at present. What might happen in the future, who could say?

Well, to resume. He found her in tears, and succeeded, with little difficulty, in consoling her.

"I must go back to my friends now, my pretty Leah," he said; "but I will come to-morrow, and see about the things I am going to buy."

"Father will be here all day to-morrow," she said; "that will do capitally. He can serve you so much better than I can."

"Can he? Well, that is a matter of opinion. Will he be here the day after?"

"No; he is away every other day. He has just gone into another business in the Minories, and that takes up a great deal of his time."

"Then I shall come on the day after to-morrow," said Rodney. "Mind you are at home."

"Oh! I shall be at home, of course. But you mind you don't bring that dreadful, great sailor who insulted me so."

"Insulted you? Nonsense! He didn't mean it, I'm sure."

"But he did insult me," she cried, flaring up again. "And if you were a man you would take my part, and kill him, or do something."

"But I'm not a man," he replied, laughing; "only a boy I'll kill him, though, if you like," he said, suddenly looking gloomy and ferocious. "Where can I buy a pistol?"

"Oh, no, no! Don't, pray don't! I didn't mean it," she now cried in real terror, so well did he play the part.

"Well, then, I won't, since you ask me not to; but I must say I should like to—I should, indeed. Mayn't I just half kill him?"

"No, no! Not for worlds! He would, perhaps, kill you, a great, big, ugly brute!"

"Well, then, since you won't let me, I suppose I must refrain; but it's a great nuisance. Good bye now, sweet Leah. I will come again the day after to-morrow, and then

you shall rig me out, as Billy-go-easy says, 'ship-shape and Bristol fashion,' whatever that may mean."

Rodney, having bidden the pretty Jewess adieu, hastened to join his companions, Black-ball Bob and Billy-go-easy. These two characters were now getting fresh—quite "three sheets in the wind." However, Rodney was well aware that if he adopted a seafaring life it would not do to be squeamish or particular as to what his shipmates did ashore. The trio rolled up Ratcliff Highway, one singing the inevitable "free and easy" song, the other vociferating something quite different, the purport of which Rodney could not pretend to make out. Down Old Gravel Lane they wended their jovial way, our hero keeping the path, whilst the two sailors rolled along the roadway. Arrived at the celebrated "King Billy," in they dived, and found themselves in the company of an uproarious lot of sailors, to the number of some score, all shouting, singing, dancing, and drinking "at the rate of knots."

Billy-go-easy and Black-ball Bob were received with a shout of welcome.

"Yo, ho, there! Splinter me if it ain't Black-ball Bob, or my name ain't Sandy Macgregor, the ugliest man in the merchant navy."

The speaker, who rejoiced in the expressive sobriquet of "Ugly," staggered up to our friends, and insisted on standing drinks to them. He well deserved his nickname, for a more ill-made, crab-visaged, broken-nosed specimen of humanity, it would be difficult to imagine.

"Who's this young shaver?" he asked, his eye (he only had one) falling on Rodney. "A chum o' yours?"

"He is so," replied our hero's first acquaintance. "I'm going to ship him wi' me for the *Windsor Castle* to-morrow."

"Right you are. What'll you drink, young feller?"

"Rum," was the short and simple reply.

Seeing every one there drinking spirits as though it were ginger-beer, Rodney thought he would be in the fashion, and, swallowing a stiff glass of raw rum, was nearly choked thereby.

"Hillo, my young chip, who are you, and where the deuce do you come from, all so neat and dandy O? Why, you look as if you'd just come out of a handbox, or were the boat-swain's boy at a ball."

Turning, Rodney saw a long, lanky, sallow, puny-faced youth, perhaps some two years older than himself, and five or six inches taller. He wore a coarse blue shirt, dirty canvas trousers, his hair was rough and matted, and altogether he looked the reverse of a taut and tidy sailor. Not liking his manner, and seeing he was only an overgrown boy, Rodney answered, sharply—

"What's that to you? Mind your own business."

"You're a saucy whelp—a barber's clerk out for a holiday, I reckon."

"You're a dirty scamp, and no sailor, I'll swear."

"I'll bung your eye up for you, you young whipper-snapper, I will!"

"Will you?" retorted Rodney, not a whit frightened by the other's menace; "I reckon I shall be there when you do it."

"Now then, Pelican," said Black-ball Bob, who was at the other side of the bar, talking to another shipmate whom he had recognized; "what are you making a row about? Whose eye are you going to bung up?"

"Why, this young counter-jumper's here—toggled out to make believe he's a sailor. I'll smash the young whelp."

Whereupon he squared up and suddenly aimed a blow at our hero's head, which he only just managed to avoid by springing back.

"The blazes you will!" said Bob the Blazer, striding round; "that young chap's a chum o' my old chum Billy-go-easy."

Before Rodney could return the blow, Bob had seized his attacker by the scruff of the neck, and commenced shaking him as a terrier would a rat.

"You're no sailor, you thundering great loblolly boy. I've been aboard ship with you. You're no good—not worth your salt. Cuss me if I don't fix you. Here, one o' you

chaps, go out into the washhouse afore me, and take the lid o' the big boiler off. Be quick about it."

One of Bob's chums instantly ran to do his bidding, and the Blazer, dragging his prisoner with him, walked across the yard and into the washhouse.

"Now, Jack, are you ready with that boiler? Cuss me, if I don't shove this hulking beggar in, and boil his bones down for glue!"

"Hold your row, Pelican, will you? and take it easy, as my friend Billy says. It's no use your hollering—tell you you've got to be boiled down for glue."

Pelican, as he was called, did not see the joke a bit. There was a great fire burning under the copper. Black-ball Bob was notorious for his recklessness, and his prisoner feared that he really meant to carry his threat into execution.

Loud and dismal were his howls, and his captor, in whose hands he was helpless as a child, dragged him towards the boiling copper.

"O Lord! Lord!—don't, don't! Let me go—murder—help!"

This was a regular free-and-easy house, and as rows and skylarking were of frequent occurrence, nobody took any notice of the Pelican's outcry.

Black-ball Bob lifted him from the ground, still howling dismally.

"Now, then, Pelican, say your prayers."

"Oh! oh!—oh! oh!—help, help!"

Vainly the Pelican kicked, struggled, and howled. With relentless cruelty the strong sailor lifted him over the copper, and lowered him down till he could feel the hot steam. His roars were now dismal in the extreme. All the inmates of the bar had come out to see the fun, and stood grinning around. (Be it observed Bob had tipped them the wink that he did not really intend to boil the unfortunate Pelican down for glue.)

"Now, look here, Pelican: suppose I let you off boiling (I don't believe there's much glue in your bones), and throw

you over the wall into the next yard instead, what will you give me ? ”

“Anything—anything, only let me go.”

“Will you give me your advance note when you ship ? ”

“Yes—yes.”

“And your chest o’ clothes ? ”

“Yes—oh ! let me go ! ”

“And two years’ wages, paid in quarterly instalments, as the lawyers say ? ”

“Yes—yes ! ” (He would freely have promised ten.)

“All right—over you go into the next yard.”

With these words Black-ball Bob took three strides, and with a “Ahoy there, on the other side ! ” hove his victim clean over the low wall.

There was a crash of crockery—a shrill screaming in a female voice.

Every one roared with laughter. This was just such a “skylark,” a bit of “horse-play,” as sailors delighted in.

Then there followed renewed uproar on the other side. It seemed that the Pelican had landed among the plates and dishes which the cook next door was washing up. * When this worthy and strong-bodied female recovered her self-possession, she seized the mop, and chasing the intruder round and round the yard, belaboured him until he made his escape, capless, and in a woeful plight, through the house into the street.

Our hero, though he laughed with the rest, thought this very rough play. It must be remembered that this was his first day in sailor company.

Rodney ordered and paid for some liquor, which was drunk with uproarious noise, and it was not till nearly eleven o’clock that he at last persuaded Billy-go-easy to leave the scene of revelry. He reminded the old sailor that he had promised to take him to his boarding-house, which if he failed to do would leave our hero houseless.

“All right, my lad,” said Billy-go-easy, now quite tipsy ; “it shall never be said that this old craft left a consort in distress. Come along ; I’ll tow you into harbour.”

He did so ; and Rodney Ray, being tired, turned into a very decent bed provided by Widow Jones, the keeper of the boarding-house.

Thus ended our hero's first day, not at sea, but in "sailor's land."

CHAPTER XII.

OUR HERO SHIPS ON BOARD THE "WINDSOR CASTLE."

ON the following morning Rodney sallied out with his Mentor, the old sailor, who, since the affair of the previous night, fancied him more than ever, and took considerable credit to himself for having discovered such a "scarer," as he delighted to call him.

It was about noon when they arrived together at the shipping office—of course not without putting in to several houses of call on the road, in each of which the old salt had what he was pleased to call a "morning top."

At the office were the shipping master, a clerk, and the captain and mate of the *Windsor Castle*. Before them, on the table, lay the ship's articles, as the terms of agreement between owner and the crew are called. Herein were specified the nature of the voyage, the quantity and quality of the provisions, the duties of each man who shipped, and the wages.

Captain Scott made a point of always witnessing the shipping of his crew, and refusing such candidates as did not please his fancy. The *Windsor Castle* was a full-rigged ship of nine hundred tons, and carried a crew of thirty-two men, including officers and captain. About half had already signed when our friends arrived ; so Billy-go-easy stepped forward to the table at once, telling Rodney to follow him,

"Mornin', Cap'n Scott—sailed wi' you before, sir."

"Ah, Billy, is that you ? I remember, two years ago, when I had the *Albatross*. All right, my lad, put your name down. Three pounds ten a month—East India voyage—

out and home—port of discharge London : if discharged anywhere else, fare paid home."

"Right, cap'n, that'll do me. When does she sail?"

"Haul out o' dock a week on Thursday. Come, sign your fist."

The sailor took a pen, and signed in large, straggling characters—"BILLY-GO-EASY."

Captain Scott smiled, but said nothing. He knew the old salt and his peculiarities, so took no notice.

"Now then, step forward the next man—eight more able seamen wanted, two ordinaries, and one boy."

"Ax your pardon, sir. Here's a lad wi' me wants to ship. I can answer for him," jerking his head towards Rodney as he spoke, who accordingly stepped forward.

"Ah! a decent-looking young fellow—make a smart sailor in a year or so, if there's anything in him. How old are you, boy?"

"Nearly sixteen, sir."

"Strong and well-built for your age. Been to sea before, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Never mind that, cap'n, he's all right; I know him—he's a 'scarer' he is, and no mistake."

Captain Scott smiled and nodded.

"Very well, my lad—you can put your name on the articles. Pound a month—never give more to green hands. You can write, I suppose?"

"Write!" exclaimed Rodney, with a slight tone of indignation; "of course I can." He forgot that it was very common for sailors to be able to do nothing more than make their mark.

Hardly had he signed his name when Black-ball Bob came up to the table. Without a word he took the pen from our hero's hand, and, looking in the captain's face, who said never a word—merely nodding—wrote on the broad sheet of paper.

"That's a pretty purser's name!—what do you call it—Peter—Hoffern-hoofen Vanden-scoffern?"

"That's about right, cap'n—does very well for a purser's name—belonged to a dead Dutchman."

"Thursday week, Bob."

"All right, cap'n."

Rodney could scarcely refrain from laughing when he saw the extraordinary name which Bob had signed. He afterwards learned that many seafaring men always ship and sail under assumed names. The reason of this was not so easily to be made out. Black-ball Bob certainly put it very forcibly.

"You see, my lad, I shall get scragged—that's hung, you know—run up to the yard-arm—one of these days for some of my devilries—and it's just as well as my people at home should never hear of it. They might read in the papers that Peter Hoffer'n Scoffer'n, etcetera, had paid the last penalty of the law, etcetera—and say, Serve the vagabond right : but if they knowed it was me, there'd be howling and wailing, etcetera."

That morning Rodney spent cruising about on his own hook in the neighbourhood of the docks—the East India Road and Ratcliff Highway—making purchases and so forth.

The fact was he felt glad to get away from Billy-go-easy and his rackets crew for a space. They were all tough and seasoned to the fiery rum, but his head ached still from the effects of last night. Not knowing what to do, he would have visited the pretty Jewess, but he remembered that she said her father would be in, so he resolved to wait until the following day. He bought some books, a writing desk, case of instruments, manual of seamanship, and an "Epitome of Navigation." By the aid of the book on practical seamanship he learned the names of all the masts, yards, and sails—as there were plates of ships of all kinds and in all positions, under sail and at anchor. He had often heard speak of "boxing the compass," and inquiring from Billy-go-easy what it meant, learned that it was repeating the names of the thirty-two points from N. round by E., to N. again. Thus, and in looking over the book on practical seamanship, he passed the day. The following morning he

went down with Billy-go-easy and Black-ball Bob to see the ship, in the docks.

Presently Billy-go-easy commenced to give him a lesson in seamanship.

"Do you see that yard across the mainmast. What's that?"

"The mainyard."

"Good lad—and the one above it?"

"Main-topsail-yard—and above that is the main-top-gallant-yard, but it is not crossed yet."

"Why you've been to sea before?"

"Never been aboard-ship in my life till to-day."

"Well now, what rope do you call that?" asked Black-ball Bob, pointing to one which led from the end of the mainyard-arm to the quarter.

"That's the starboard main-brace."

Billy-go-easy looked astonished, but, withal, triumphant. Black-ball Bob, however, was determined to nonplus our hero; so, pointing to a rope between the mizen and mainmasts, he said—

"What rope is that?"

Rodney thought for a moment, and fortunately was able to recollect what his manual of seamanship said.

"That's the mizen-top-gallant-stay—its use is to stay the mast forward, and also to set the top-gallant stay-sail on."

"Blow it all!" cried Billy: "I always said you was a scarer, and so you are, and no mistake. Come along, Bob, we'll have a liquor-up on the strength of that."

This was the invariable clincher Billy-go-easy put on everything. Good news or ill news, good luck or bad luck, it was always the same—"we'll have a liquor-up after that, anyhow."

Neither knew how Rodney had acquired his information on nautical matters, and the more they questioned him, the more were they astonished at his answers.

Much undeserved ridicule has been thrown on what is called "learning to be a sailor by book;" that is an impossibility. Nevertheless, an acute lad on his first voyage

may derive much useful assistance from a good work on seamanship.

Late in the afternoon our hero strolled round to the side street where was situate the shop of Reuben Jacobs. Miss Leah was standing at the shop-door as he came down the street, but though she retreated as soon as she saw him, he observed her, and flattered himself she was waiting for him.

"Well, my charming daughter of Judah!" was his free-and-easy salutation; "how fares it? I hope I see you well."

"Oh!" she said, affecting to have forgotten what occurred at their first interview; "I suppose you have come about those clothes you thought of getting here."

"Ah! yes, exactly," replied Rodney, not deceived by her artifice in the least; "that's just what I have come for."

Leah produced whole piles of goods, and commenced dilating on the manifold excellences of the various articles, just as might her worthy father. Rodney, however, did not show any great anxiety to select what he wanted, and soon the conversation veered from business to other matters. He told her he was going to sail next week for Calcutta, on a twelvemonth's voyage at least—and she presently expressed a wish that she might go also. At this he laughed, and said it was not usual for girls to go to sea.

Then she reminded him of the celebrated case of Billy Taylor's sweetheart, of immortal memory, who donned male attire and shipped as a seaman—also how, when the captain came to hear of it, he very much applauded what she'd done, and he made her first lieutenant, &c.

Whereupon Rodney advised her to do likewise, and ship on board the *Windsor Castle* as cabin-boy.

"But it's too late, isn't it? The crew is all shipped, I thought you said?"

She spoke quite seriously, and Rodney did not know whether to laugh or not.

"You don't know how tired I am of this life," she said, "day after day the same—selling coats and tarpaulins, and

taraulins and coats, to great drunken sailors. I wish I was a boy, I do."

"Ah, well, my pretty Leah, it's no use wishing ; let's talk of something else—are you fond of music ?"

"Oh, yes, very fond ; but I never have an opportunity of hearing any."

"Well, what do you say if we go to the opera some night when your father is away ? We can be back here by half-past twelve if we leave early."

"To the opera ? But that is miles away, is it not ? Do you know, I have never been farther west than the city in my life ?"

"It's in the Haymarket ; but we can go by train to Fenchurch Street, and from there a cab will take us in half-an-hour. We must go in the gallery, because it is all full dress in the pit and stalls, and I haven't any clothes—so it won't cost so very much."

"Oh ! if I dared. How dearly I should like to go !" she cried, clasping her hands, and looking as if she meant it.

"Well, that's settled then," said Rodney, decisively.

"What do you say to the day after to-morrow ?"

"I should like to," she said, hesitatingly, "but I'm afraid."

She who hesitates is lost.

And without much difficulty, he persuaded her to risk parental displeasure for the sake of this, to her, unprecedented treat.

And so it was settled. They remained talking, though, long after that, and it was late when Rodney got to the boarding-house. Wonderful to relate, both Billy-go-easy and Black-ball Bob were quite sober, and playing "all fours," when he came in.

"Hallo ! my hearty, where have you been all the afternoon and evening ? Bet a dollar I know ; you've been taking a cruise to Jerusalem, to see that pretty Jewess !"

Though Rodney faintly denied it, his looks betrayed him, and after that he used to receive many a rub about his visits to Jerusalem.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VISIT TO THE OPERA.

THE visit to the opera was fully decided on, and arrangements made accordingly.

It was settled that Leah was to shut up her father's shop at six o'clock precisely, and meet our young scapegrace at the railway station at half-past. She felt nervous and frightened, and half-afraid ; but she had gone too far to retreat, so at all hazards resolved to carry out the little programme they had arranged between them.

He, the incorrigible scapegrace, laughed at her fears, nor thought for a moment that through him this girl was doing wrong. It was capital fun, and that was all he cared.

However, they arrived safely at Fenchurch Street, and there hailing a cab, were driven to her Majesty's Theatre, in the Haymarket.

All went merry as a marriage-bell. Leah was delighted with the glorious music—the rich decorations, the splendid scenery : she had never dreamt of anything so grand before. To her it was fairy-land. However, they left in tolerable time, and before the majority of the audience.

Walking arm-in-arm down the piazza, looking out for a cab, Rodney's attention was suddenly drawn to a young lady standing with her back to him at the grand entrance.

There was something in the figure—the shape of the head, the attitude, and the dress—which was familiar to him. That she was quite a young lady was sufficiently obvious. While he was wondering and puzzling his head to think where he had seen her, she turned round suddenly, and he found himself face to face with Lucy Maitland !

To say that he was surprised would poorly express his feelings—he was aghast at the unexpected meeting. She, on her part, when she saw him, started violently. Then she moved forward a step ; but the next instant her glance fell on Leah Jacobs, who was leaning on his arm, looking very showy and handsome in her scarlet opera cloak. Lucy's

eyes swept her from head to foot ; then she turned, and quickly moved away further into the building.

Rodney shook off his companion's arm, to her great mystification, and darted after Lucy.

"Lucy, who would have thought of seeing you here ?"

"And who of seeing you ?" she replied, coldly : "who is that—that person you had with you ?"

Rodney coloured to the eyes and looked very confused, as, under the circumstances, might a much older sinner.

"That—oh ! that's a friend of a friend of mine. Billy-go-easy's his name, and this is his niece."

Lucy's lip curled in haughty contempt. She was every inch an aristocrat, this parson's daughter.

"I wonder you have the presumption to speak to me. If I had known how you would have spent it I would not have lent you the money I did. I suppose when it's all gone you'll go home. Don't come near me ; that is all I have to say."

"You are very much mistaken, Miss Maitland," he said, as haughtily as herself ; "and as for your money, I'll send it to you to-morrow."

"You need not trouble : here comes my father."

Now Rodney by no means cared to meet Mr. Maitland. He did not know but that he might attempt to collar him, or instruct a policeman to take him as a runaway. So, though he was burning with anger and had plenty to say, he thought it best to leave the scene as quickly as possible. He found Miss Leah outside, in a terrible state of anger and excitement.

"Why did you leave me in that ungentlemanly way ?" she cried : "who was that you were speaking to ? But it is no business of mine ; I don't want to know. I shall get home as quick as I can, and never speak to you again. I wish I had not been such a fool as to come out with you ; but I thought you were a gentleman."

Here her tears flowed, and Rodney, who all through his life never could bear to see a woman any way remorse-stricken, at once said—"Indeed, I could not help it.

Jump into this cab ; we shall just be in time for the last train. I will explain as we go along."

The girl obeyed—not appeased entirely, but waiting to hear with some curiosity what he would say.

"That's the young lady I told you lent me sixteen pounds. I had no idea she was in London.

"Oh! that is the lady, is it?" said Leah. And a jealous pang shot through her heart as she remembered how handsome the girl was, and how richly dressed.

"Yes ; and she was in a terrible rage, I can tell you."

"A rage!—why?"

"Because I was with you."

"You don't mean to say she was jealous?" asked Leah. And now she felt a kind of pleasure to think that she should make this fine lady jealous, and that she would have the mortification of seeing him go off with herself.

"Well, I suppose so ; I wish I had not borrowed that money of her, or that I had it all to return her. I said I would, in my anger—forgetting that I had spent a good deal of it."

"Don't let that trouble you," said Leah, laying her hand on his arm.

"But it does trouble me. I never thought Lucy would have been so mean as to taunt me with it, after having lent it to me."

They arrived safely at the station, caught the train, and for that night all was well. Leah reached home, let herself in, and when her father came in the morning he had not the least idea that his daughter had last night been to the opera with such a scapegrace as Rodney Ray.

Hitherto all has gone smoothly with Leah Jacob's flirtation with her boy-lover ; but in the next chapter we propose to illustrate the proverb that "the pitcher which goes onen to the well is broken at last."

CHAPTER XIV.

RODNEY IN CUSTOD

On the following day Rodney went round to the shop of Reuben Jacobs ; not solely to see the girl, but to learn whether she had got into any scrape through him.

Miss Leah Jacobs received her boy-lover—for so she considered him—in a very singular manner. She gave him a sealed packet, and told him to go home, and read the contents. She refused to answer any questions, but merely repeated that he was to go home, and open it.

He did so, and found there three five-pound notes and one sovereign—sixteen pounds. There was a note enclosed, short and to the purpose :—

“You need not be afraid to accept this. I have fifty pounds more in the savings-bank, and I should like you to pay back the young lady who taunted you with having borrowed from her. You may believe me when I say that I shall never taunt you with it. You can pay me when you like—when you have made your fortune, come into a fortune, or never. If you are too proud to accept this, I beg you won’t come to see me any more.—Believe me your sincere friend,
LEAH JACOBS.”

Rodney did not hesitate for a moment as to what he should do. It was freely offered, and as freely would he accept. So he forthwith made up a parcel, and enclosed a letter to Miss Maitland. Afterwards he thought it was unnecessarily harsh, but at the time he was angry, and did not care what he said. This was the letter :—

“MISS MAITLAND,—I return you herewith the money you lent me, and regret that I ever lowered myself so far as to accept a loan from one who could be mean enough afterwards to taunt me with it.—Your obedient servant,

“RODNEY RAY.”

This he took up to the West-end himself, and posted, registering it at the same time. Though so young, he felt a man in spirit, and was cautious enough not to post in the neighbourhood where he was, lest his father should discover

him, and take him into his custody by force, which he had a legal right to do.

From the time of the receipt of that letter his feelings towards the pretty Jewess underwent a great change. He was now deeply grateful to her, and had, besides, strong evidence of the esteem in which she held him. The nearer the day for the sailing of the *Windsor Castle* approached, the more frequent and prolonged were his visits to the store of Reuben Jacobs.

The ship was to leave the docks at high water, which would be two o'clock in the afternoon of Thursday. On the Wednesday he stocked his little chest with all he required, from Reuben Jacobs' store. Leah did not forget to put in many little articles on her own account. Now that this young scapegrace was about to leave, she acknowledged to herself how much she cared for him.

Hitherto they had always talked in the shop, so that if her father entered hurriedly he might naturally suppose that Rodney was a customer. But on the Wednesday night, grown bold by impunity, she invited him into the little back parlour to supper. Rodney insisted on bringing in a bottle of champagne, that she might drink success to his voyage. At ten o'clock she put up the shutters, and closed the shop, and the two sat down to enjoy their supper. The wine was opened, and soon their hearts warmed, and their tongues began to rattle on faster. Eleven o'clock struck, and still they sat talking, Rodney expatiating on the great things he would do, and the pretty things he would bring her from the East Indies. As they sat, side by side, on the sofa, their eyes sparkling brightly, the face of each full of expression and excitement, they looked liked a pair of young turtle-doves—so loving, and yet so innocent.

But suddenly "a change came o'er the spirit of their dream."

Her father's knock at the door—she knew it at once, and turned pale with terror! What was to be done? A second and louder knock pronounced that he was impatient; and then she heard his voice—

"Leah, open quick, my child. I shall sleep here to-night."

He could see a light, and knew she was up; so there was no time for delay.

Her woman's wit suggested a possible means of escape. Quickly placing the empty bottle and glasses under the table, she led him by the hand, a finger on her lips, into the dark shop.

"I am coming, father; wait half a moment."

"Half a moment! I've waited five minutes, I should think, already."

Leah led Rodney behind the counter, and, placing her hand on his shoulder, made him stoop and get beneath. Then she whispered, very softly—

"Keep quiet here. When he has gone to bed I will come and let you out."

Rodney could do nothing but obey, so he curled himself up on some clothing which was there, and made himself as comfortable as he could under the circumstances. He heard Leah open the door, and let her father in.

"What on earth were you about, Leah, that you couldn't let me in at once?" the old man said, grumblingly.

"I was partly undressed, father."

"What! and the supper things not cleared away? Humph! You're a pretty housekeeper."

She was in awful terror lest he should notice the two knives and forks; but fortunately he did not do so.

"Well, and how's business to-day?"

"Pretty well. I've taken seven pounds ten."

"Sold any of that last lot of pilot cloth coats—those I got from Rabbi Absalom so cheap?"

"Yes, one."

"Ah! that reminds me that there's one among the lot to be marked at a higher price. I noticed it when I bought them of him, but he didn't;" and the old man chuckled over the thought.

"Give me the candle, Leah; I'll look it out now."

"No, not now, father; you must be tired."

She was in mortal terror lest, if he went into the shop, he should discover the stranger who was hidden there.

"Yes, yes, I tell you," he said, testily ; "don't talk to me ; give me the candle."

He took it and went into the shop. Leah stood watching in an agony of fear. If he should discover Rodney, what would be the consequence ?

Fortune seemed to favour the delinquent daughter, for Reuben Jacobs found the coat, and, throwing it over his shoulder, walked back towards the parlour.

Leah breathed freely once more.

Alas ! she thought herself safe too soon. Her father stumbled and nearly fell. As he did so his head came below the level of the table, and he saw the crouching figure of Rodney. But he was a crafty old man, and had self-possession enough to pretend unconsciousness,

"Leah, my dear, go to bed. I shall not want you any more to-night."

"How pale you are, father !"

"I am not quite well, my child ; go to bed. I have two or three important letters to write."

"Confound the old fellow !" said Rodney to himself ; "I suppose now I shall have to wait, cramped up here, till he has finished."

He had not the least idea that he had been discovered, so well did the old man play his part.

When his daughter had gone up-stairs the old Jew went to a cupboard and took out a large double-barrelled pistol, which he always kept there, capped and loaded. Having examined this carefully, he walked to the door, opened it, and stood there quietly, humming an air.

"How long is this to last ?" thought Rodney ; "the old curmudgeon said he was going to write some letters. Why doesn't he begin and get finished, I wonder ?"

It did not last long. Soon was heard the steady, measured tramp, tramp of the policeman on the beat. Reuben Jacobs beckoned to him, which caused him to come to the door.

"There's a thief—a burglar, under my counter," he said ; "take him quietly if you can, as I don't want to alarm my daughter."

The pair came into the shop ; and while the constable stood at the door Reuben walked up to the counter.

"Come out, my man ; you are discovered—you may as well go with the policeman quietly."

So saying, he held down the candle, and Rodney, seeing that further attempt at concealment was simply ridiculous, came out, looking very crest-fallen and sheepish indeed. He saw also that to resist or attempt to escape was equally hopeless, so allowed himself to be marched off to the station-house—Reuben Jacobs accompanying to prefer the charge.

"Aha ! that was cleverly managed," chuckled the Jew—"quietly and easily done. I thank you much—it did not disturb my daughter, dear Leah ; she is so shy and timid, it would have made her faint."

Little did he think that Leah, in an agony of terror and grief, saw and heard all from the foot of the stairs. Had any one told him that his daughter was concerned in the concealment of this young man on the premises, he would not have believed them.

And now behold our hero at the station-house, before the inspector of police—that monarch of the night !

"Oh ! ah ! found hiding under your counter, eh ? Charge, found concealed on your premises with intent to commit a felony—that will be the way to shape it, I think."

Mr. Reuben Jacobs assenting, the charge was so entered in the sheet.

"Your name, prisoner ?"

"At present I decline to give it."

"Prisoner refuses to give his name," wrote the inspector, on the charge-sheet.

"He's young at the business—does he belong to Sykes' gang ?" he asked of the constable.

"Stranger to me, sir. I'm inclined to think he's a West-end thief. Fancy I've seen him, but can't say where."

"Ah ! very likely—we'll have a sergeant of the A Division to-morrow morning—lock him up. Mr. Jacobs, you must be here to prosecute to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

The Jew returned home triumphant at the thought of his clever capture, and truly pleased that he had not alarmed Leah.

When he got back to his own house he entered softly, saying to himself—

"I will not let the child know anything about it. It is best that she should remain in ignorance. It would only frighten her."

So he locked up and went quietly to bed, little dreaming that his daughter Leah was up and dressed, and crying her eyes out at this terrible affair.

As for our hero, he was, of course, greatly dismayed at being dragged before an inspector, and charged with felony. On consideration, however, he felt perfectly confident that he was in no danger. He had had already abundant proof of the girl's regard for him, and was confident that, if necessary, she would come forward and clear him of any felonious intent. As to himself, and what he should say, he had made up his mind that he would not utter a word which would criminate her. He would not say how or why he was there, unless she did—or gave him express permission to do so. If the worst came to the worst, he would simply declare that he was there with no felonious intent, and take his chance.

He considered he was bound in honour not to betray her confidence, and made up his mind to suffer imprisonment rather than do so.

So with this determination, he pulled the collar of his pilot cloth jacket over his face, and lying down on the hard bench, dropped off to sleep.

When he awoke it was nearly seven o'clock in the morning. He knocked at the door of his cell, and asked the constable who came to answer it, if he could send a note to a friend, in order to procure legal advice.

He was allowed to do this, and furnished with paper and pencil. He wrote at once to the boarding-house :—

“DEAR BILLY-GO-EASY,—I have been to ‘*Jerusalem*’ once too often, and am locked up for being found with intent to commit a felony. Come and see me—Yours truly,

“PHILIP VANDERDECKEN.”

Of all things, he did not want his name to appear, and trusted that Billy would know whom the note was from, and yet would also understand that he wished to give an assumed name when before the magistrate.

It was characteristic of our hero’s disposition that he did not feel any alarm as to the consequences of his frolic with the pretty daughter of Reuben Jacobs. To be sure, his predicament was not a pleasant one, but neither was it of a nature to make him intensely miserable. He was awake enough to know that the charge of being on the premises with a felonious intent could not possibly be substantiated.

His only anxiety was as to the course Miss Leah would take. Had she at once told her father? or would she wait till the morning?

Time alone could solve these questions, so Rodney made the best of his situation. Long before the hour appointed for the opening of the police-court, his cell was opened, and a gentleman entered, who at once announced that he was a solicitor, and had been sent by the prisoner’s friends. Thereupon any little misgiving which remained was dissipated from the mind of Rodney.

“Now, my lad, you must tell me everything which occurred, and how you came to lay yourself open to this charge.”

“That is easily done, sir. The young lady did not expect her father home that night, and had invited me to supper. On his unexpected return, she led me into the shop, and bade me conceal myself till he had gone to bed, when she would come down and let me out. Of course, not wishing to get her into a scrape, I did so. The old Jew happening to come into the shop for something, stumbled,

and saw me beneath the counter. Then he went to the door, called a policeman, and here I am."

"Here you are, indeed; and a very serious case it appears."

The attorney was bound to make the most of it, and did so accordingly.

"You see, young fellow, there is *primâ facie* evidence of your being on the premises for an unlawful purpose; it is all very well for you to assert that you were there by the girl's invitation."

"I shall assert nothing of the kind. She will come forward and prove it."

"Supposing, however, that instead of so coming forward and acknowledging that you were there by her consent and invitation, she denies it *in toto*? In that case the *onus* of proof will rest on you, and if you fail to give a satisfactory account thereof, you may be committed for trial on the charge of being concealed on the premises with intent to commit a felony. Do you intend to produce any evidence as to character—to call your friends to prove your respectability?"

"No, sir; I shall call no one," replied Rodney, undauntedly; "I don't believe the girl will suffer me to lie under an unfounded charge. If she does, I shall do my best to defend myself; tell the plain truth, and take my chance."

"You would probably—almost certainly—be remanded under those circumstances, in order that inquiries might be made as to your antecedents and character."

At this Rodney looked grave. Just at that moment, however, a constable came up, and addressing the solicitor, said—

"There's a sailor and a young girl wish to see you, sir. They asked to be admitted to see the prisoner, but when told no one could be allowed to see a prisoner on a charge of felony but an attorney, they want to see you."

The solicitor followed the constable, and Rodney awaited the result with considerable anxiety.

Presently the solicitor returned, and exclaimed—

“It’s all right !”

But before he could enter into any explanation, the chief gaoler appeared, and announced that it was time to go before the magistrate.

Rodney was hurried off to the court, and after waiting some time found himself in the presence of the representative of justice, charged with being found concealed on certain premises, with intent to commit a felony.

Reuben Jacobs detailed how he had first seen the prisoner beneath his counter, and the policeman narrated his share in the grand capture.

“A bad case,” said the magistrate. “Have you anything to say ?”

Rodney looked round, but not perceiving Leah, and not knowing what steps she had taken, he held his peace.

“Committed for tri—” commenced the magistrate.

“Beg pardon, your worship,” said the solicitor, entering the court at that moment, “but I am instructed to defend.”

“Very good ; but the case seems very clear to me.”

“The prisoner, your worship, was not on the prosecutor’s premises with any illegal intention, but permitted himself to be locked up rather than betray the confidence of another. As my first witness, I have to hand your worship this written declaration.”

The magistrate adjusted his spectacles, and read as follows from the paper the solicitor handed him :—

“I certify and declare that the prisoner, Rodney Ray, was in my father’s house by my permission when discovered by the policeman. We were supping together, when I heard the voice of my father at the door ; fearing his anger, I told Rodney to conceal himself in the shop until my father should have gone to bed, when I would come and let him out quietly. This is the whole truth, as witness my hand.

“LEAH JACOBS.”

“I believe that is your daughter’s handwriting and signature, Mr. Jacobs ?” asked Rodney’s attorney.

The old man was too utterly confounded and struck

aghast to speak. He held the letter in his hand, and gazed at it with speechless horror, his hand trembling the while as though with palsy.

His daughter, his Leah, child of his old age, had, unknown to him, been in the habit of receiving the visits of a strange youth, and that youth a Christian! Oh! how, had an enemy told him this, he would have laughed it to scorn! But here it was before him in black and white. There, in his beloved Leah's handwriting, he read the record of her disgrace—for as such he looked at it.

While he was still attempting vainly to realize the full extent of the calamity which had befallen him, the magistrate addressed him—

"This note is not evidence; you can, if you choose, go on with the charge; but then it would be necessary to produce your daughter in court, to speak as to the falsehood or authenticity of that document."

"Yes, yes," cried the old man, excitedly, "it is a falsehood, a forgery, a base, wicked forgery; my daughter is a just girl; my Leah coot not do this thing. Oh; goot heavens, no!"

Though he had been many years in England, he had originally come from Germany; and when he was excited, spoke broken English, intermingled with scraps of German.

Rodney even felt disposed to pity the old man, bowed down with the humiliation and misery of the discovery of his daughter's fault.

"In that case," said the magistrate, "I will put back the case for an hour or two, in order that you may produce your daughter, who will have to swear that this document, purporting to be signed by her, is a forgery."

Here again was a worse alternative. The idea of having his daughter—his darling Leah—produced in a police-court, and compelled to describe circumstantially how foolish she had been—to see her the cynosure of all eyes, and have the affair bruited about in the papers! No, no, a thousand times no!

Having expressed his disinclination to this, the magistrate said—

“Then you acknowledge that this letter addressed to me is written by your daughter?”

“Yes, I suppose so,” he groaned. “Oh, that I should live to see this day! Oh, that my gray hairs should be so disgraced in my old age!”

“As for you, young fellow, I have a great mind to remand you on this charge, and insist on the production of this foolish girl, who has so far forgotten what is due to herself, and her duty to her father, as to encourage a young scapegrace like yourself in his absence. As the prosecutor, however, declines to go on with the case, I shall discharge you. I should advise you to be more careful of your future conduct. It is my opinion you are an incorrigible young scapegrace. Prisoner is discharged.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST DAY ON SHORE.

THE court was soon filled with sailors—friends and shipmates, past or future, of Black-ball Bob and Billy-go-easy. Quite a shout of applause greeted this fortunate termination of our hero's incarceration.

The particular policeman who had taken our hero did not scruple to aver his opinion that the letter was a clever forgery got up by some of the prisoner's “pals,” and that he was, in reality, an audacious young thief. However, the fiat had gone forth, and Rodney was free.

As he stepped from the dock Billy-go-easy pressed forward to greet him, which he did with a grip of his horny hand which made our hero wince again.

“Well done, my lad! Splinter me, but you are a scarer. Come over the way, and we'll have a liquor up.”

Bob, too, had his rough congratulation, and so had a score more “shell-backs” who had heard of the affair.

Rodney was now emphatically one of them, and, though he had never been to sea in his life, was freely admitted a member of the seafaring community.

He was undoubtedly the hero of the hour.

This early triumph, and the successful bounce with which he carried the adventure through, caused him to be looked upon as a sort of youthful prodigy. It had, moreover, an effect upon himself not altogether desirable. It gave him an exalted opinion of himself, his powers, and capabilities, and confirmed him in his reckless habits. When he saw the old Jew Reuben bowed down with grief, his better nature for a while prevailed; but shortly an incident occurred which caused him to consider the angry father fair game for sport.

Outside the court Reuben met the late prisoner face to face. It was purely an accidental meeting; but no sooner did the Jew's eyes rest on our delinquent hero than they flamed fire. His frame shook with passion, and with outstretched hand he commenced a bitter denunciation.

Rodney, though he affected to laugh at it, felt secretly annoyed. As for the assembled sailors, they laughed and made fun of the old man, and the more excited he got, the louder grew their mirth—the coarser their chaff.

“Blaze away, old skull-cap!”

“Where's the pretty little craft, your daughter?”

“Who'll drink to the old Jew's pretty gal?”

“And her sweetheart,” shouted another.

“Here's to the wind that blows, the ship that goes, and the lass that loves a sailor.”

“You'd better clap her under hatches, and batten down, or splinter me if this young scarer won't carry her off.”

“May an old man's curse light on you, you ungodly boy! You've brought sorrow and shame on me. Tunder and blitzen, but you'll rue your work yet. You've set a daughter against her father, and laugh at his gray beard. May you never know peace! May the sea be always stormy, and the wind foul to you! May Jehovah put His mark on you, and send you out like Cain, a wanderer on the face of the earth!”

This, and much more, said the old Jew ; but presently his thoughts were directed in a different channel by a coarse jest of a half-drunken sailor.

So he hurried off home to see to his daughter, leaving Rodney not by any means pleased. He felt just a little ashamed of himself, and though he put a bold face on the matter, he could not think without some compunction on the terrible scrape he had got his pretty friend the Jewish maiden into. He learned from the attorney who had been employed to defend him that when she gave him the letter she expressed her determination of not going home. She dared not face her father, she said. She would not face him.

"What would she do?" the lawyer said ; and advised her to go home, and make the best of it.

She did not know—anything—she would drown herself—run away—but she would not go home.

The letter was written in the coffee-room of a neighbouring inn, and after she had finished it she suddenly came to a resolution—dried her tears, put down her veil, and hurried away, saying only, "*I know what I will do. Tell him not to be surprised under whatever circumstances he sees me.*"

Without explaining or saying any more, she hurried away.

What was it she was about to do ?

Rodney shuddered as the thought flashed across his mind that she would commit suicide.

Speculation, however, was useless, and it was with a feeling of sadness that Rodney Ray wended his way to the boarding-house, in order to pack up his things in the little sea-chest he had purchased. Most of his outfit had been purchased at the old Jew's shop, and the articles had all been carefully folded by Leah herself. Several times he had half suspected that she had put in many things at less than the selling price, and now, on having occasion to go to the bottom of the chest, he discovered a pair of sea-boots and a small triangular wooden case. On the boots, and also on the case, were fixed by pins two little slips of paper—"Rodney Ray. A present from his friend, Leah Jacobs."

"Poor little girl!" said Rodney to himself, with a sigh; "she must have been very fond of me. I am sorry I got her into trouble."

With this compassionate reflection, he opened the triangular case, and discovered it contained a small but useful quadrant, as used by navigators to determine the latitude and longitude. This evidence of her thoughtful care for his welfare greatly affected him, and he began to realize the fact, that though this affair had been with him a matter of fun and frolic, with her it was very different. He regretted now that he had ever made her acquaintance, and speculated mournfully on her future fate.

By the time he and his future shipmates at the boarding-house had had their dinner, the hour had come for them to proceed to the docks with their chests, and go on board the *Windsor Castle*—their floating home, in all probability, for many a month.

Their progress to the docks was not a rapid one, as, with that hankering after the pleasures they were about to relinquish for so many months, the sailors, especially Black-ball Bob, dived into pretty nearly every grog-shop on the road. Rodney, however, refused to drink any more, and after a somewhat devious course they arrived alongside the *Windsor Castle* shortly after three o'clock.

The vessel was just being warped out, and was in the narrowest part of the dock—the entrance where the water is shut in and admitted by the floodgates. Their chests had already preceded them, and clambering on board by the channels, Rodney Ray stood on the deck of the *Windsor Castle*—his first ship.

"Steward," called the captain from the beak of the poop.
"Sir."

"That boy that you engaged is ill, and can't join; his mother's been down here. But I've shipped another—one who came on board, and offered himself this morning—a clean and very decent-looking lad, though rather delicate for the work, I fancy; however, you must do the best you can with him. He'll join at Gravesend to-morrow morning."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Now, my lads, bear a hand ! get your chests in the fore-castle, and settle in your bunks. We shall be in tow of the steamer, and on our way down river, in a few minutes. There's heaps to do—clearing up and getting ready for sea—so heave a-head, and let's make a good beginning."

"Ay, ay, sir," was the ready response.

In ten minutes each man and boy had chosen his bunk—put therein his bed and bag, and placed his sea-chest opposite.

By the advice of Billy-go-easy, Rodney chose a bunk close to the scuttle, immediately above that of the old sailor.

"You'll find the benefit of being near the watch, my lad, when we get in the tropics ; dead calm, may be, and as hot as blazes."

These arrangements being completed, all hands went on deck to help warp the vessel out into the stream.

A rope attached to a buoy in the river was taken to the capstan, and to the quick-step of a song the sailors coiled it in round the capstan.

"Avast heaving ! so, cast off and haul in the slack !" the mate shouted from the poop.

The vessel now slowly moved out of dock, and a hauser being passed to the steam-tug in waiting, all was ready for a start.

At that moment the figure of a man in a long robe and skull-cap was seen running along the edge of the wharf.

"Hi ! hi ! stop, Mister Captain ; stop de ship."

"Pend off at the tons there," cried the mate ; "cast off the stem rope. A man at the wheel."

The steamer had taken her in tow, and now she glided slowly out into the stream.

"Stop her ; stop de ship !" yelled old Reuben Jacobs, for it was himself. "De vagabones have stolem yd aught-ter."

"Is that old fellow mad ?" asked Captain Scott of the

mate. "Wh. on earth is he kicking up all that row about?"

"He says ~~they~~ve stolen his daughter," replied the mate, laughing.

"Fiddle-de-dee! what could have put that in his head?"

The crew gathered around the capstan on the forecastle now perceived old Reuben.

"Go it, old gaberline!"

"Bravo, Shylock!"

"My daughter! my daughter! Oh, mien Got! tunner un blitzen! What have you done with my Leah? "Give her to me. Oh, mien Got! stop de ship, captain! come back—if you don't I'll—I'll—I'll County Court you!"

At this terrible threat there was a perfect roar of laughter, in which the captain and officers joined.

The old man stood on the wharf, tearing his hair, yelling, stamping, and gesticulating—a ridiculous, but a pitiable object.

It was clear that, for some reason or other, he believed that his daughter was on board the *Windsor Castle*.

"Go a-head, full speed!" shouted the captain of the steam-tug.

"Starboard your helm; hard a starboard," cried the mate of the ship to the man at the wheel.

The hauser tightened and creaked under the strain; bystanders on shore waved their hats and handkerchiefs, and the good ship *Windsor Castle*, bound to Calcutta, sped on her way down London river.

The figure of the old Jew, in gaberline and skull-cap, could be seen standing on the edge of the quay, gazing wildly after the vessel—the picture of misery and despair.

But soon the crowd faded into an indistinct mass; the wharves and warehouses grew small and indistinct, and while the *Windsor Castle* sailed merrily down the stream, wind and tide in her favour, the old man was "left lamenting."

CHAPTER XVI.

REUBEN PROCURES A WARRANT, AND SEARCHES THE SHIP FOR HIS DAUGHTER.

It was evening when the anchor was let go at Gravesend. When the decks had been cleared, the yards squared, and all made snug for the night, supper was served for the crew, and anchor-watches of two men each set.

Though the evening meal consisted only of boiled beef, biscuit, and tea without milk or sugar, but sweetened with molasses, our hero did not fail to do justice thereto, for the fresh air, and, above all, the exercise which abundant work to be done had rendered necessary, sharpened his appetite.

The anchor-watch from ten to midnight fell to him and Billy-go-easy.

Now it happened that the old sailor, who had been drinking pretty hard all the afternoon, was heavy with sleep. So he proposed that our hero should keep watch, and pace the deck, while he slept off the effect of the liquor, rolled in an old tarpaulin on the main-hatch. To this Rodney readily agreed—for it was a beautiful moonlight night, and he was not in the least bit sleepy.

“You know the orders, my lad?”

“Yes, I think so—but you had better repeat them.”

“Keep a bright look-out, see she don’t drag her anchor, strike the bell every half-hour, don’t allow any boats alongside, and call the skipper (the mate’s ashore) if anything happens. Do you understand?”

“Ay, ay, Billy,” replied Rodney, who now felt quite a sailor.

“And call me if anything’s up, instanter.”

“Ay, ay.”

Whereupon the old salt rolled himself up in the sail, and went off into dreamland, leaving our hero in sole charge of the deck.

It was not without feelings of pride and exultation that

Rodney Ray marched up and down the poop of the *Windsor Castle*.

He made frequent visits forward and placed his hand on the chain-cable, as instructed by Billy, to discover whether she dragged her anchor. When this is the case a vibratory motion is always felt on the cable, and thus the mariner is made aware of what is going on.

But nothing of the kind occurred ; the night was calm and beautiful, and the vessel lay at anchor, serene and peaceful, as though asleep.

Still Rodney kept up his promenade to and fro on the poop, duly impressed with the importance of the trust confided to him.

The watch wore on, eleven o'clock came, and he struck six bells ; half-past, seven bells ; and he was thinking that it was getting near midnight, when he was to call the next watch.

The splash of oars fell on his ear, and looking towards the Kent shore he saw a boat approaching, evidently coming right towards the vessel.

As it got closer, he could distinguish three people seated in it besides the boatman. Nearer and nearer came this boat, and Rodney went to the gangway.

“ Ship ahoy ! ”

“ Hallo ! ”

“ Put your Jacob’s ladder over ; we’re coming on board.”

“ Keep off,” was the reply ; “ no boats allowed alongside.”

“ In the name of the law, on her Majesty’s service ! ” bawled a tall man, who arose from the stern-sheets of the boat.

This staggered Rodney, and he did not know what to do. Just at this moment Billy-go-easy, awakened by the noise, joined him. So soon as he was informed what had passed he hailed—

“ Lay off a bit till we call the captain.”

“ Throw us a rope, then, the tide runs strong.”

“ Ay, ay,” was the reply, and while the sailor was heaving the rope Rodney went to call the captain.

When Captain Scott came on deck he at once ordered the Jacob's ladder to be put over the side, and the men allowed to come on board.

First came two strong, rough-looking men, and in the third Rodney recognized, to his utter amazement, Reuben Jacobs, the father of Leah.

The two men, who proved to be detective officers, walked on into the cabin, where the captain was awaiting them to know their business, but the old Jew, directly he recognized Rodney, burst forth again into a torrent of invective.

"Tat is de tam villain," he said, pointing, with his hand trembling visibly from his excitement. "Tat is de ungotly rascal what take my daughter, my tear Leah, away. Oh! but de law shall stop you—I will have you transport, you infernal young scamp."

Rodney was glad to get beyond ear-shot of the old fellow's abuse.

"What on earth could have made him think that I'd got the girl on board?" he said to himself. "Such a ridiculous idea!"

But ridiculous or not, Reuben Jacobs was firmly impressed that it was so, and had succeeded in persuading a magistrate to grant him a warrant to search the vessel and recover his daughter.

Rodney Ray was summoned into the cabin.

"What do you know of this affair, young fellow?" asked the skipper, fixing his eagle eye on him.

"Nothing whatever, sir."

"Oh, te lying tief, didn't I find him hid in my shop? He's got my daughter, captain—he has, so help me Abram, hid away."

"Do you know where the girl is?" asked the skipper, "or anything about her?"

"Nothing whatever. I have not seen her since last night, when, it is true, I was at her father's shop."

"He lies, te tam young scoundrel, mien Got! She is here now, my Leah, oh, my daughter."

"You lie yourself, old Jew," said Rodney, angrily.

"Well, well," put in the captain, "that is nothing to me. I am the captain of this ship, and declare I know nothing about any girl. You are police officers?" turning to the two detectives, "do your duty, and take care not to exceed it."

"All right, captain," answered the taller one, "we shall stay on board all night, and then have a look round in the morning. If the girl is on board, it is our duty to find her."

"Very good, my men; you can do as you please, so long as you don't interfere with me. I shall turn in—good night!"

Rodney's watch was also over, so the two officers were left on deck all night with Reuben Jacobs, whose lamentations over the loss of his daughter, and imprecations on the head of her supposed abductor, were incessant—let us hope they enjoyed his company.

In the morning a strict search was instituted, to which neither the captain nor officers made any objection. In the cabin, forecabin, and hold, they looked, aloft and below, fore and aft, and old Reuben even insisted on one of the officers going down the chain locker. This resulted in great fun for the crew, but nothing else, and at last they were compelled to give up the search.

First, however, they demanded to see the list of passengers. This was furnished, but there was no one at all answering the description of the truant girl among them. Then one of the officers asked Captain Scott if he had all his crew on board?

"Yes," was the reply, "that is to say, with the exception of a cabin-boy, who is to join presently, and if he doesn't make haste he'll lose his berth, for I don't intend to wait for man, woman, or child, with this fair wind. All hands! up anchor! Let me know when she's hove short, Mr. Pye," to the second mate.

"Ay, ay! sir."

Reuben and the two officers hereupon took their departure, the latter looking very woe-begone indeed.

Then was heard the clank, clank of the windlass as the

cable was hove in, the sailors accompanying it by a merry capstan-song.

"Anchor's hove short, sir."

"Loose the topsails and jib, and heave the mud-hook up."

While some were loosing the sails the rest of the crew worked merrily away at the windlass, and soon the anchor is torn from its bed, and the ship's head swings slowly round.

"Sheet home the fore and main topsail—run up the jib. Mr. Pye, bear a hand about it."

"Ay, ay ! sir."

All was now bustle and hurry. The topsails were sheeted home and hoisted, the jib run up, and then the anchor was hove up to the bows.

"Boat coming alongside, sir !" shouted the mate from the forecastle.

"Who the devil's in it, and what do they want, I wonder ?"

"Only the boatman and a lad."

"All right, it's the steward's boy. If he'd been five minutes later he'd have lost his passage, that's certain. Get him on board and send him to the steward."

A rope was thrown to the boat, and when she was brought alongside a dark, delicate-looking lad clambered on board, and, waiting only till his bag and bed were thrown up to him, hurried into the cabin.

The skipper spoke to him as he passed in.

"Find out the steward, my lad ; he'll show you your berth, and set you to work."

"Yes, sir," replied the lad, timidly, and vanished into the cuddy.

Meanwhile the yards were trimmed to the wind, the fore-sail and top-gallant sails loosed and set, and the ship rapidly began to gather way.

At that moment another boat, rowed by two men, and with three others sitting astern, was seen coming towards the ship.

The men in the stern-sheets stood up, raised their hands, and shouted as they neared the vessel.

"Here's another boat wants to board us, sir," shouted the second mate from the forecastle.

The captain took a look at them through his glass.

"Oh, confound them! it's that old Jew and the police officers again; let them catch us if they can. Set the mainsail, spanker, and flying jib"

For a little while the boat gained on the ship, which was somewhat slow in gathering way; but she soon felt the effect of the fresh canvas set, and now began to dash through the water at some six or seven knots.

There came a hail from the boat—"Ship ahoy!"

"Holloa!"

"Bear to, in the name of the law."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" said the skipper, *sotto voce*.

Onward sped the good ship *Windsor Castle*, careering in a favouring gale, and each moment increasing her speed. It was evident that the boat must be left behind. The man who had hailed saw it was hopeless, apparently, for saying a word or two to his companions, he reseated himself. Then up started the old Jew, bareheaded, his long gaberdine flying in the wind.

"Stop te ship, stop te ship—tonner un blitzen! In de name of de law, in de name of Abraham and Moshes and de prophets, in de name of Got—stop de ship! Mien daughter is on board."

But his appeal elicited only a shout of laughter, and away the good ship sailed before the breeze.

The old Jew could be seen frantically gesticulating, and waving his arms, long after his voice was audible, till presently one of his companions pulled him down in the boat.

"How persistently the old fellow sticks to it we've got his daughter on board!" said the captain laughingly to some of the cabin passengers who were on the poop. "Now that we've fairly started, we'll drink success to our voyage. Steward, send up decanters and glasses. Where's that boy? let him make himself useful."

Putting his head down the skylight, the captain called again—

"Steward's boy, where are you ? Come, bear a hand."

But no one answered.

"Confound that boy ! where can he have got to ? Suppose he'll turn up presently."

As to where the new cabin-boy had been no one could say, but he did not make his appearance for full half an hour, and then looking very pale and frightened.

"What a strange boy !" said one of the passengers to the captain, at lunch. "He's a good-looking, clean lad, but he seems awkward and frightened, as though he did not know what he was about. What fine eyes he has !"

"Oh, confound his eyes !" replied the skipper. "He'll have to find his hands and use them too, on board this ship."

The wind increased to a stiff breeze, and by five o'clock in the afternoon the *Windsor Castle* had passed the Nore, and was standing for the Downs. The crew were employed clearing up the decks, and making all taut and ship-shape below and aloft till supper time, at six o'clock. After which all hands were mustered aft, and the mate and second mate commenced choosing the men for their respective watches.

Rodney Ray and Billy-go-easy were chosen into the starboard watch, that of the second mate, Mr. John Pye, a smart young officer and a very good fellow.

Eight hours in fell, as was customary, to the starboard watch, so at eight bells (eight o'clock) Rodney turned into his bunk, to be called at twelve hours to help the middle watch.

Nothing of any moment occurred during the night, the wind continuing fair, and the ship making good progress down Channel. So here we will end the chapter, and commence the next with another day.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NAUTICAL CHAPTER.

OUR scapegrace hero turned in at four o'clock, after keeping the middle watch, and rose at half-past seven, when called

for breakfast—a sailor, and at sea, for the vessel was now well on down Channel, and the white cliffs of old England could scarcely be discerned.

This, his first experience of nautical life, was by no means of a nature to discourage him. True, the weather was fine, the wind fair, and the ship a good and seaworthy one, commanded by a captain who was at once a man and a gentleman.

And now a few words as to a sailor's life at sea may not be inopportune.

At eight o'clock in the evening "eight bells" is struck, and the watch who are to have "eight hours in" go below. Probably most people are well aware that the crew of a vessel is divided into two watches, one of which, at least, is always on deck, night or day, while at sea. In harbour a different arrangement is made, and one or two men only are on deck at night. This is called "anchor watch." Well, at eight o'clock we will suppose the port or larboard watch go on deck, as is the case on the first night at sea of the *Windsor Castle*. The man at the wheel is relieved by whosoever turn it may be of the other watch. As he gives up the helm, he at the same time gives out the course to be steered; as, for instance, west by south, southing to the westward; or if the wind be foul, and the ship cannot lay her course, "full and by" is the word, which means that she is to be kept as close to the wind as she will lay with the sails all full.

Every half-hour the bell on the forecastle is struck to denote the time, in the following manner:—At half-past eight the bell is struck once; this is one bell. At nine, two bells; at ten o'clock, or four bells, the man at the wheel and the look-out are relieved; at half-past eleven it is seven bells, and at midnight again eight bells. As soon as the welcome sound of the bell is heard, the boatswain's mate—if the ship carries one—whistles through his pipe, and begins thumping at the top of the forecastle scuttle with a handspike, shouting with a loud voice—

"Starbow lines ahoy! Eight bells there below. Turn out, you sleepers!" or something of the kind.

If there be no boatswain's mate, the pipe is of course dispensed with, and one of the watch does the calling.

Ten minutes is the utmost allowed for the man at the wheel and the look-out to be relieved.

The watch from midnight to four o'clock is called the middle watch ; and while the starboard watch are on deck, those of the larboard watch turn into their bunks or hammocks and sleep—not a long sleep, however, for at four o'clock in the morning exactly the other watch in turn is aroused by the unwelcome shout, “Larbow lines ahoy ! Eight bells there below !” &c.

Then, with eyes heavy with sleep, the men of the port watch have to turn up, leaving their warm bunks and pleasant dreams—for, perhaps, rain, sleet, wind, and bitter cold.

It is very hard at first, this short spell of sleep at a time. During a voyage a sailor never gets more than three and a-half hours sleep at one time. By the time he has been relieved, and has turned into his bunk, it is close on one bell, and at eight bells he is again to go on deck.

Well, to proceed. At six o'clock, or four bells, in most ships, the men of the watch are provided with hot coffee from the galley—this is esteemed a great luxury, but as soon as it is swallowed, the officer of the deck gives the word—

“Clear up for a wash.”

The boys of the watch have then to coil up the ropes, clear everything from the decks fore and aft, attach the hose to the pump, get out the buckets, and make everything ready for the wash-down, which takes place in every ship every morning without fail, except in heavy weather.

The second day-watch is from six to eight o'clock, when the first night-watch commences. The use of these two day-watches is obvious. Were the watch to be from four to eight, the same men would always have to be on deck from eight to twelve, and from four to eight in the morning, while the others would always have the middle watch—from midnight to four o'clock—fall to them.

This is obviated by the two day-watches, and the middle

watch on deck alternates with each half of the crew from night to night.

Those who have the middle watch are said to have eight hours in, meaning that they sleep from eight to twelve, and from four to eight.

It will be readily believed that, with such a regular course of life—with nothing to mark one day from another—time glides on very rapidly at sea. A sailor has no worry, no anxiety, no trouble on his mind ; all he has to do is to eat, drink, sleep, keep his watch, and work—the rest is all done for him.

Except for the short hours allowed for sleep, I believe a seafaring life to be a very healthy one.

The above is a brief sketch of the everyday life of a sailor before the mast in fine weather. In bad weather he has greater hardships and dangers, and harder work, to contend with.

Of course the comfort and happiness of the sailor depend greatly on the captain and officers. The skipper may be a bully, and make a ship a “floating hell” to all under him, while another may cause himself to be loved and respected by all.

So far as the captain and mates were concerned, our hero might consider himself indeed fortunate. A better sailor, or a more brave and kind-hearted man, than Captain Scott, never trod a plank, and the two mates also were very decent fellows. The passengers were very well in their way ; but as for the crew—ah ! there was the rub. It soon began to be discovered that a large proportion of the foremast hands were a set of the greatest vagabonds unhung. The captain had, without knowing it, shipped a gang of ruffians of all nations. Bob the Blazer recognized two or three as Blackballers of the most ruffianly stamp. Two men in particular—Yellow Dick and a great ruffian who went by the name of the Louisiana Lamb—had been engaged in running several cargoes of slaves, and many other nefarious transactions. However, no trouble was anticipated from this villainous gang at first. It was not known, however, at first, that they

had all sailed together before, and formed a regular band—having sworn to stick to each other whatever might happen. When Bill-go-easy became aware of this, which he did by accidentally hearing a conversation, he shook his head, and said gravely—

“There’ll mischief come o’ these fellows if we don’t watch it—mark my words, there will ; they’ll be up to some devilry before the voyage is out.”

Rodney Ray fell easily and pleasantly into the routine of his duties ; the wind, though fair, was strong, and the sea rough for the first week, so most of the cabin passengers were suffering from sea-sickness. It was mentioned casually that the cabin-boy, who had come on board at Gravesend, suffered dreadfully, and had been unable to do anything.

For the special behoof of young fellows anxious to go to sea, I will conclude this chapter with an account of a boy’s work and duty. I speak here of a boy before the mast, or apprentice, as assuredly that is the way for a lad to learn his profession.

In the ordinary day’s work boys are taught to knot and draw yarns, make spun-yarns, &c., and are employed in assisting the able seamen in their work on the rigging.

Slushing masts, sweeping, clearing up decks, holding the log reel, coiling of rigging, and loosing and furling the light sails, are duties that are invariably put upon boys or green hands. They stand their watches like the rest, go aloft to reef and furl, and work wherever and whenever the men do ; the only difference being in the kind of work on which they are put.

In reefing the boys lay in towards the slings of the yard, and in furling they go out to the yard-arms. They are sent aloft immediately—as soon as they get to sea—to accustom them to the motions of the vessel, and make them “spry” in the rigging. Loosing and furling the royals, setting top-gallant studding-sails, and reeving the gear, shaking out reefs, and learning the names and uses of all the ropes, and to make the common hitches, bends, and knots, reeving all the studding-sail gear, rigging in and out

booms, and the like, is the knowledge first instilled into beginners.

There is a good deal of difference in the way in which boys are put forward in different vessels. Sometimes in large ships, where there are plenty of men, the boys never take the wheel at all, and are seldom put upon any but the most simple and inferior duties; in others, they are allowed to take the wheel in light winds, and gradually, if they are of sufficient age and strength, become regular helmsmen.

So also in their duties aloft—if they are sharp and quick they may be kept at the royals and top-gallant sails, and gradually come to the earing (the post of honour in reefing) of the mizen top-sail. In work upon rigging, however, as a rule, a green hand makes but little progress beyond rope-yarns and spun-yarn during his first voyage, since there are men enough to do the jobs, and he can be employed more advantageously in the inferior work, and in making and taking in light sails, steering in light winds, &c., a competent knowledge of which duty is sufficient to enable him to ship for an ordinary seaman on the next voyage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“LEAH!”

RODNEY, though an uncommonly sharp youth—quick of apprehension, and, what is of as much importance, at application—did not learn all contained in the previous chapter at once. But, nevertheless, he progressed rapidly, and what with Billy-go-easy’s willingly rendered assistance and his own aptitude, there were not many ropes and no sails or spars in the ship which he did not know.

For the first week after sailing, the weather was fair, though the wind blew hard, and there was a short chopping sea; but at the expiration of that time, the breeze, which was from the east, and a little south, died away, and gradually hauled round against the sun till it was dead foul. Then the

weather became thick and hazy, and the barometer slowly fell. The skipper, mates, and most experienced seamen were at a loss where to expect the wind, but that a gale was brewing in some quarter all good judges felt assured.

It fell dead calm, and then there came on a drizzling rain, amidst which there arose, almost imperceptibly, a light air from the south-west. Hour by hour this increased in strength, and on the seventh day after leaving the Downs the *Windsor Castle* was staggering along close-hauled under top-sails, courses, top-gallant-sails and jib, quite as much as she could carry comfortably, as proved the "green seas" which she now and again shipped over her bows.

One of these, heavier than usual, rushed aft, and, bursting in the door, deluged the cabin with water. Rodney happened to be standing by the mainmast at the time, and Captain Scott, who was on the break of the poop, ran down the ladder.

"Get a couple of buckets, a baler, and swab, my lad, and lend a hand to the steward to get the water out of the cuddy. My lady passengers will be combing my hair with a three-legged stool, I reckon, if I let them get their feet wet, pretty dears."

Rodney of course obeyed, and promptly, and for the first time entered the cabin. The lady passengers, as the skipper had said, were in a great way, and, on the sudden invasion of water, had all taken to their cabins.

It was neither a long nor a difficult task, that of baling out the half-flooded cuddy, and in a quarter of an hour there remained nothing to do but swab down the deck.

Rodney worked with a will, as he did at everything he undertook, whether good or bad. When the place was freed from water, the captain came down, and, taking his seat at the head of the "tell-tale" compass, called to the steward to bring him a chart from his cabin. But the steward happened to be forward, arranging about the dinner for that day with the cook.

"Boy, boy, where are you?"

"Here, sir," said Rodney, promptly, who was swabbing the floor, thinking he meant him.

"No, not you, my lad ; the cabin-boy I want. Here boy—you Taylor—Billy Taylor. Where are you ?"

William Taylor, be it observed, was the name under which the steward's boy had shipped.

"Here I am, sir."

Rodney went on with his swabbing, but thought the boy's voice was a very soft and curious one.

"Get me the big chart in the black tin case from my cabin."

"Yes, sir "

Rodney was now swabbing up towards the head of the table, and to reach the captain, the boy would have to pass him as he returned with the chart. Rodney stood up and moved to allow him to do so, and the two stood face to face. Our hero dropped the swab, and for a moment was perfectly aghast. Nor could he repress an exclamation. It was only one word—

"Leah !"

Yes ; it was indeed Leah Jacobs whom he saw before him in the guise of a cabin-boy !

CHAPTER XIX.

A PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPE.

"WHAT's that ?" cried the captain, sharply.

The girl, quick as thought, gave him a sign to be cautious.

He was no fool, seldom lost his presence of mind, and replied briskly—

"I said, 'Oh ! dear,' sir ; this stupid young lubber trod on my foot."

"Ah ! indeed."

Captain Scott said no more for perhaps half a minute, but looked keenly at our hero. Leah, the supposed cabin-boy, had vanished.

"Well, my lad, you're not a young lubber, that I'll take my oath of ; but it's my opinion you're a thundering young rascal."

"Thank you, sir," replied Rodney, only too glad to think that his exclamation had not betrayed the girl, who, through him, had thus run away from home, and unsexed herself. He was glad to escape, and when he got down into the fore-castle, turned into his bunk solely with the object of thinking over the marvellous discovery he had that day made.

Leah Jacobs on board the *Windsor Castle*! Her father, then, had good grounds for his suspicions.

She had run away from home to follow his fortunes—*his fortunes*—a poor boy before the mast. What could it all mean? How would it all end? He could ask, but could not answer, the questions.

One thing his instinct told him, and that was, the girl was passionately fond of him.

But Rodney had little time or opportunity for speculation on the marvellous discovery he had just made. There was plenty to do on deck.

The sea was rising fast, and reflecting the hue of the leaden-coloured clouds, which now drifted overhead in dense masses, assumed a dark and angry appearance, quite at variance with the deep blue of the previous day.

The ship pitched and laboured heavily; her timbers groaned, and her masts creaked from the press of sail she was carrying, and as she plunged a-head on her mad course ever and anon she buried her bow deep in a huge roller, deluging the decks with water, and well-nigh carrying the sailors off their feet.

It was about the commencement of the second dog-watch, when the captain, exasperated at being overhauled by another vessel, gave the order to set the fore-topmast-stu'n-sail. Night was fast closing on the tempestuous scene, when the mate suddenly shouted, "Let go the top-gallant halyards!"

The captain ran on deck, and a glance to windward convinced him of the imminence of the peril. A furious squall was sweeping over the sea, and sending high in air the spray, tearing off the crests of the waves, and apparently driving the whole surface of the ocean before it with terrible speed.

RODNEY RAY.

roaring and shrill shrieking of the tempest was heard as it swept on, the sky growing momentarily blacker, and darkness seemed to close in on the scene suddenly. The sea to windward and all around gleamed with a phosphorescent glare, and the vessel heeled over till her lee yard-arms almost dipped in the sea.

Presently, with a report like that of a cannon-shot, the top mast stunsail boom broke short off. In such a gale the sail should never have been set, but Captain Scott was determined to carry on.

There was a sound of the thrashing and tearing of canvas for a few moments, and then not a rag remained of the sail. The violence of the gust had thrown it clear away to leeward, the wind saving the trouble of clearing the wreck.

"Clew up the main-top-gallant sail," shouted the skipper, "hard up with the helm, keep her dead before the wind."

This was done just as the squall burst on the ship in all its fury.

Unfortunately, the top-gallant yard would not come down. The violence of the wind jammed the parral against the mast, and it not being possible to clew up the sail, there was imminent danger of the loss of the mast.

"Lay aloft there one of you, and get the yard down ; it's jammed in the parral."

Rodney Ray was standing close by the poop-ladder at the moment. He was at this time pretty spry aloft, and, naturally of a fearless disposition, he was about climbing into the rigging, when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder.

"Don't go up there, Rodney ; for heaven's sake don't."

He saw it was the supposed cabin-boy, Leah Jacobs, who had seen him from the cabin door about to mount aloft, and was come out to dissuade him.

He had not yet got over the shock which the sudden discovery that she was on board in disguise gave him, and now that for the first time he had an opportunity of speaking to her, he gave vent to his astonishment.

"What in the name of heaven made you do this, Leah ? Why did you come on board in this masquerade dress ?"

"What was I to do?" she said, piteously. "I dared not go home, and besides, would not if I had dared. You are the only person in the world for whom I cared, and who I hoped cared for me. I have read of girls disguising themselves as men, and serving as sailors and soldiers, and why should not I?"

"But what on earth will you do? How is it all to end?" asked Rodney, bewildered.

"I'll depend on you—you only. Oh, say that you will not desert me."

Now, while Rodney remained talking with Leah, half-a-dozen seamen sprang into the rigging to get the top-gallant-yard down and furl the sail.

Fortunate indeed was it for our hero that the girl's voice and touch delayed him; otherwise, as she spoke the last words he would have been on the maintop-gallant-yard.

"Jump aloft on the foretop-gallant-yard, boy, and make the sail fast better. That lee gasket is coming adrift. I wonder what lubber passed it."

It was the voice of the mate, and of course put an end to the conversation.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the ready reply, and Rodney was quickly on his way aloft.

It was now nearly dark, and would have been quite so but for the phosphorescence of the sea lashed into fury by the wind. He was just climbing into the cross-trees when the full fury of the fierce squall burst on the good ship, and at the same moment she came up a point or two to the wind. The masts creaked and groaned dismally, and for a second or so it seemed as though she were about to capsize bodily; but fortunately she answered to her helm, and again paid off before the wind, tearing along through the foaming waves like a frightened racehorse. At this moment the foretop-gallant-sail, which he had been sent aloft to secure, burst entirely from its fastening, and thrashed and fluttered loudly in the gale. Though at imminent risk of being beaten off, Rodney clambered on the yard, and endeavoured to gather up the canvas and again

pass the gasket ; but his efforts were vain, his young strength was as nothing. The sail was torn from his grasp, the bunt-lashing gave way, and the next instant the whole sail was loose, and fluttering furiously in the gale with a noise like that of thunder. Our hero had to hold on with all his strength, to prevent himself being knocked off the yard. While thus holding on like grim death, he heard the mate shout, "Lay aloft there, four or five men, and secure the foretop-gallant-sail. Bear a hand or it will be blown to ribbons."

Knowing that he could do nothing by himself, he held on and waited for help.

Two men were at the wheel, but with their utmost endeavours were unable to keep her straight before the wind. Each moment she threatened to broach-to.

The men sent to aid our hero were at this moment just climbing up to the topmast rigging. Looking down on deck he noticed a sudden confusion, and heard the voice of the captain, who had been standing by the wheel—

"Lay aft there with relieving tackle, the tiller-ropes have parted ! Quick ! for your lives !"

Rodney scarcely realized the imminence of the peril at first, but a shout from the sailors in the topmast rigging aroused him—

"Lie down from aloft ! she's broaching-to !"

Then he saw the active seamen swing themselves on to the backstays and glide swiftly down. Almost at the same moment he felt the ship come flying up to the wind. She heeled over till her lee lower yard-arms were plunged in the waves.

"Lie down from aloft," the captain shouted through the speakin g-trumpet, "down for your lives !"

At the same instant lightning flashed from the black sky, and peal after peal of thunder crashed overhead. A sharp report like the breaking of timber caused Rodney to look behind him. He saw the shrouds of the maintop-gallant-mast part suddenly ; the next moment was heard the crash of the breaking mast, the wild cry of the unfortunate sailors,

and the mast, yard, and men, were lost in the raging sea to leeward.

For a moment Rodney remained stupefied at the terrible catastrophe. He looked into the boiling sea beneath him to leeward. For a moment or two he could discern struggling forms, blended with a confused mass of ropes, timber, and canvas. Then the great waves swept on and overwhelmed the whole, and nothing was to be seen save the raging sea which had just swallowed up its prey. He was roused from his state of semi-stupefaction by the voice of the captain—

“Foretop-gallant-yard there, come down ! Down for your life !”

Again the storm-blast, which for a moment had lulled, burst on the ship ; the masts creaked and groaned, the shrouds were taut and hard as bars of iron ; Rodney swung himself on to a backstay and slid rapidly down, burning his hands severely by the friction. Scarcely had he touched the deck when he heard another crash, and the next instant the foretop-mast went by the board. A few moments later and he, too, would have shared the fate of the unfortunate men who lost their lives from the maintop-gallant-yard.

Presently the wind moderated a little, and it was our hero's turn to take the look-out on the forecastle. While pacing up and down this narrow space he had ample time to think over the stirring events of the day—the sudden discovery of Leah, the Jew's daughter, in the supposed cabin-boy ; the loss of the top-gallant-masts, with the six unfortunate sailors.

“At all events, her being on board was the cause of my life being spared,” he said to himself. “If she had not stopped me and held me in conversation for a minute or two I should have been on the top-gallant-yard, and have perished with my unfortunate shipmates.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE CREW OF THE "WINDSOR CASTLE."

WITH such a gale raging and sea running, there was no chance whatever of saving the unfortunates who had been hurled into the sea with the broken mast. A rush was made for the starboard-quarter boat, but long ere the lashings could be cut loose the whole of the seamen had been swept away by the furious sea. To lower a boat would only be to incur the loss of other lives as a matter of certainty. Therefore, with heavy hearts, officers and men set themselves about the task of clearing away the wreck.

Not without some trouble fresh tiller-ropes were rove and the ship put before the wind ; and then all hands set to work, some clearing away the wreck, others reefing the maintop-sail and making all snug.

The crew worked on in gloomy silence, the fate of the unfortunate men fresh in their minds.

"That comes o' carryin' on," muttered Billy-go-easy. "If ever you reaches to be a skipper yourself, my lad, let this be a lesson to you. If our capt'n hadn't made up his mind to beat t'other ship, mebbe this would never have happened, and our shipmates would not ha' lost the number o' their mess. Lord ha' mercy on their souls !"

This was all that was said, but there was a deep feeling prevalent on board on the subject. All that night was passed in clearing away the wreck of the foretop-mast and maintop-gallant-mast. In the morning the gale abated considerably, and the ship was kept on her course, under double-reefed main and mizen-topsail, foresail, and forestay-sail.

In the course of a couple of days the vessel ran into the north-east trade wind, and there was fair weather, clear sky, smooth sea, and a pleasant breeze.

There was plenty of work to do, but then there was good food and regular living, and Rodney soon noticed that he increased rapidly in size and strength. He was in the

starboard watch, or that of the second mate, and now that the crew were reduced by the loss of the six men, regularly took his wheel, for he had long ere this learned to steer.

As the voyage proceeded, and before the vessel entered the belt of calms and rains about the equator, men had become acquainted with their shipmates. It has before been mentioned that on board the *Windsor Castle* there was a compact gang of as bad characters as could be raked from the sailor-slums of New York, London, and Liverpool.

Most unfortunately, five out of the six men who were lost when the foretop-gallant-mast went were of the better sort—steady-going, honest, and good sailing men. This untoward accident gave the rowdy element a decided numerical superiority.

As affairs now stood, the crew of the *Windsor Castle* was thus composed—

Captain Scott, the master ; Henry Hayes, chief officer ; John Pyc, second officer ; George Macgregor, carpenter ; Philip Robinson, steward ; William Taylor, cabin-boy (supposed) ; Charles Williams, negro cook.

Then the crew consisted of sixteen able seamen (before the loss of the six on the topgallant-yard there were twenty-two), two able seamen, and two boys:—

Billy-go-easy, A.B. ; Black-ball Bob, A.B. ; John Rawn, A.B. ; William Stewart, A.B. ; Samuel Hall, A.B. ; Tom Jones, A.B. ; Carl Schrader, A.B. ; Richard Wilson, *alias* Yellow Dick, A.B. ; John Berby, O.S. ; Rodney Ray.

This was the starboard watch, in which was our hero. The first six able seamen on the list were good men and true, honest, hard-working sailors, but Schrader, a German, and Yellow Dick, belonged to the other division, the "rowdies," of whom, since the accident, the other watch was entirely composed. Thus in the starboard watch there were eight A.B.'s, one ordinary, our hero, and the chief mate—eleven in all.

The port or larboard watch was thus made up—

William Bloxam, A.B., a Yankee ; Diego, A.B., Santa Anna, A.B., Pedro, A.B.—three Mexican Spaniards, and as

great villains as ever sailed ; Peter Schrader, A.B., a German ; Joe Smith, A.B., a Yankee ; George Gatton, A.B., another Yankee, known as the Baltimore Buck ; Joe Smith, A.B., another Yankee ; James Hill, O.S., known as the Pelican ; Walter May, boy.

The whole of the men in this watch were a bad lot, and hung together, as is always the case on shipboard when unfortunately this element is introduced.

Besides these, there were ten passengers—four ladies, two children, three gentlemen, two of them old men, and a servant girl—making a total of thirty-seven.

The vessel was certainly short-handed, having lost more than a fourth of her original complement of able seamen. But there was nothing in the circumstances to endanger her safety ; many vessels had performed longer and more dangerous voyages without difficulty in a far worse plight.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

A FORTNIGHT after the disaster we recounted in the last chapter but one, Captain Scott, who was on the break of the poop, called to our hero—

“Come down into the cabin, my lad—I want to speak to you.”

Rodney obeyed with palpitating heart.

He had carefully avoided the cabin for fear of being unable to keep from betraying himself if he should suddenly meet the sham cabin-boy. He had seen her flitting about in her boy's dress, and occasionally going and returning to the galley, but he had always kept away as much as possible. Indeed, he did not know exactly how to take it, whether to be angry, or to laugh at her escapade, or to feel flattered. One thing was certain, it was a very awkward fix.

There was a peculiarity in the captain's manner on this

particular occasion which caused him to think that something was in the wind. Perhaps all was discovered ! Thus thinking, he followed the skipper into the cabin, and stood bareheaded by the table.

" Well, my lad, you're a nice young shaver, ain't you ? What do you think of yourself ? "

" Me, sir ? I don't understand you ! " faltered Rodney.

" Billy Taylor, boy, where are you ? "

" Here, sir. "

Rodney heard Leah's voice, musical and cheerful as of old. Now that she had become accustomed to her disguise and thought that all fear of discovery was over, she adapted herself admirably to circumstances, doing the light work of the cabin, waiting at table, and so forth, in that neat, quick and handy manner characteristic of the weaker sex.

In obedience to the captain's call the supposed cabin-boy came running up from the store-room or lazaretto. As she emerged from behind the mizen-mast, and came round to the table, she almost ran against Rodney Ray, who stood cap in hand, looking very confused under the captain's piercing eyes, which were steadfastly fixed on him.

As for poor Leah, she blushed from brow to neck—even her ears being suddenly dyed a deep carnation. She felt and looked as though she must cry, or scream, or faint, or something. Too well she knew by the sharp glances with which the captain regarded them alternately, that she was discovered. There was a half-smile on his face as his eyes swept her figure, as much as to say, " Ah ! makes a good boy ; but it's a girl all the same. "

Could it be that Rodney had betrayed her ?

At the thought she grew white, and felt fierce and angry for a moment or two ; but on reflection she dismissed the idea.

She felt that, short as was their acquaintance, he was incapable of such an act.

" Well, Mr. William Taylor, what's the matter with you ? You look all of a flurry. "

" Me, sir ? nothing, sir. "

"And Mr. Philip Vanderdecken, too—you don't seem quite at home."

"Me, sir? I am all right, sir."

But do his utmost, Rodney could not look so.

"Well, you two sprightly young fellows—you seem to look strange at each other. Now, I've got an idea you've met before. What do you say to that, eh? *Now, Leah, speak up.*"

She knew at once that all was discovered.

"Oh, sir," she cried, piteously, and bursting into tears, "I am very sorry; indeed I've tried to do my best. Pray don't punish me, or throw me overboard."

Captain Scott laughed, which somewhat reassured both of them.

"As for you, young fellow, what have you to say for yourself?"

"I have nothing to say, sir."

"Nothing to say," cried the captain, angrily, "in excuse for aiding to bring a girl on board my ship disguised as a boy—you infernal young rascal, you!"

"Oh! no, no, sir—don't be angry with him; indeed, he didn't know!"

"Not know! how dare you say such a thing? I tell you, girl, I heard him call you by name the night we lost our foretop-mast. I said nothing then, but determined to watch you, and see what your game was."

"I assure you, sir, I knew nothing about it until that occasion—the very moment when you heard me address this young lady by her name."

"Are you telling me the truth, boy?"

"I never lie, Captain Scott," our hero answered, proudly.

The skipper surveyed him keenly, with a long, steady look; but the lad's eyes never quailed.

"I am inclined to believe you," he said presently. "You don't answer like a liar. I have watched you since you have been on board my ship, and must say that you have done your duty honestly and well—and promise to make a good sailor!"

Rodney's heart swelled with just pride at this eulogium. "And now, perhaps, you will condescend to explain this affair to me—the whole of it, from beginning to end."

Rodney looked at Leah, and she, interpreting his glance aright, said—

"Yes, yes, Rodney—tell the captain everything. Indeed—indeed—sir, it was no fault of his."

"Now, young fellow, fire away ; I am all attention. And you, young lady, get me the grog and a cigar. See if you can spin a good yarn."

Whereupon Rodney commenced and related the history of the whole adventure from beginning to end. Captain Scott, though he tried to hide it, was immensely amused.

"Well, I believe you, my lad. You're not a bad chap, but an incorrigible young scapegrace, I'm afraid. And now, about you, Mr. Billy Taylor, *alias* Miss Leah Jacobs—what am I to do with you ?"

"Do with me, sir ? Oh, don't hurt me, please. I am very sorry."

"Well, well, under all circumstances, I think the best thing to be done is this. You have shipped as cabin-boy, and, barring the first week when you were sick, really seem up to the work. You go on—mind your behaviour—and, so far as I'm concerned, you may keep your secret. I shan't split on you."

"Oh, thank you, sir—thank you."

"You see, my lad—my girl—no, I'd better call you my lad—so long as the work's done on board my ship, and order and decency kept, I don't care who does it. You can make the voyage in the ship ; and when you get back to London—if you'll take the advice of Captain John Scott, you'll go back to your father."

So Leah was dismissed rejoicing.

"You can go forward, my lad," he said to Rodney, when the girl had vanished to the pantry. "What you do or don't do ashore is your own business. Do your duty on board my ship, and we shall get on very well together. Be off."

Rodney made the best of his way forward, by no means dissatisfied with the result of the interview.

Though all was known, he had been held blameless, and even the girl had not got into any serious scrape.

He was young, high-spirited, and took little thought for the morrow. How his adventure with this pretty Jewish girl would end he did not know, and did not trouble himself with idle speculations on the subject. Billy-go-easy's philosophy seemed very sensible to him, and perhaps he was influenced in the way he took things, good luck and back luck, by the example of that old salt.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MUTINY BREWING—A FIGHT.

It was not fated that the *Windsor Castle* should make a pleasant voyage without further ill fortune.

Shortly after the equator was passed, a rather alarming discovery was made. During the gale in which the foretop-mast, and maintop-gallant-mast were lost, some cargo which had been stowed securely in the hold had broken adrift. This might not have been of any great consequence, but unfortunately some portion of it (a heavy barrel) was dashed up against the large iron tank in which fully half the supply of water was carried.

So soon as this was reported to the skipper, he looked grave, and forthwith ordered an exact measurement of what remained.

The usual allowance is three quarts a day for each adult ; but when there is plenty on board, four, and even five quarts, are allowed. Now, however, it became apparent that economy must be maintained, or the vessel must put into some port for a supply. This would entail great expense, and besides bring her far out of her course ; so Captain Scott resolved to proceed, and put all hands on an allowance. He found that, allowing two quarts a day to each man, there

would be sufficient for two months more, and as they had already been more than six weeks out, it was almost certain that that period would see an end of the voyage. Neither he nor anybody else, indeed, anticipated serious mischief; still he expected much growling and discontent.

Nor was he mistaken. The whole of his watch (the port or larboard) grew insolent and lazy, and at times seemed inclined to strike work altogether. When the captain was informed of this state of affairs he called all hands aft and addressed them.

"My lads, by an accident we are on short allowance of water—all of us—for believe me, neither I nor one of the officers or men passengers have a drop more than the two quarts. The ladies I give the full allowance—three quarts, and I hope there is not a man on board who blames me. We have plenty of water if our passage is a quick one. No work on the rigging will be exacted in the heat of the day, or any work not absolutely necessary which may cause thirst. So now, my lads, make up your minds cheerfully to two quarts a day, and pray for rain or a vessel."

There was silence for a moment or two, and then arose a low murmur.

"Come now, my lads, no pouting. Take it good-temperedly, and make the best of it," said the skipper, in a light, good-natured tone.

"That's all very well," growled Gatson the Yankee, known as the "Baltimore Buck;" "but I want to know why we can't put into the Cape, and get water."

"Put into the Cape of Good Hope!" cried Captain Scott. "I can tell you, my lad. If you think I'm going to rob my owners, and put into Table Bay, you're mistaken. It's out of our course. I'm going many degrees south of the Cape to get the strong westerly gales."

"And we're to be parched with thirst that you and your owners may save money! Can't see it nohow myself," put in Bill Bloxam, another Yankee.

"No, no; let's have our water if we've got to work the ship," cried another.

Other murmurings and cries of dissatisfaction fell on the ears of Captain Scott, whose cheek flushed with anger.

"My lads, I spoke to you fair and soft because I always like to be on good terms with my men. But, by——! if you don't like what I say you may lump it. I'm captain of this ship, and I'll let you know it. Now, I'll know which of you are good men, and which of you are grumblers and skulkers. All true men, who are willing to do as I say fairly and freely, step over to the starboard side.

Captain Scott's voice rose till it sounded all over the ship like a trumpet, and his eagle eye swept the group of sailors before him on the quarter-deck.

"I'm for you, Captain Scott, anyhow. Through thick and thin Bob the Blazer's your man."

"I knew it, Bob," said the captain, with an approving smile.

"I likes my water, captain, and I likes my grog, and I likes takin' things easy. But this 'ere case seems to me pure right, and Billy-go-easy's with you."

"Good, my lad. Who else?"

"I for one, sir," said Rodney, walking manfully over the deck to the starboard side, regardless of the scowls and malignant looks of the malcontents.

"Bravo, my boy! You're a good plucky one. You'll be a captain yourself before you're thirty."

Jack Rawn, Bill Stewart, Sam Hall, and Tom Jones followed, so that now there were seven prepared to stand by the captain and officers. The rest of the crew stood sullenly apart. Captain Scott looked at them carefully and slowly, as though taking each man's measure.

"Very good, my fine fellows," he said to the malcontents. "You'll not gain anything by this. I'd rather have those six men and that lot over there to starboard than a shipload of such fellows as you. Go to your duty. Two quarts of water a day and no favour. It's no use your looking black or grumbling. Growl you may, but work you must, and snarl, too, by thunder!"

With this sea-saying the skipper wound up his address to

the discontented ones, and then turned to Billy-go-easy, Bob the Blazer, and the rest.

"As for you, my lads, I'm obliged to you for showing a good example. Rely upon it I won't forget you. I've had my eye on all of you. Six good men, the best I've got on board, and a lad there almost as good as a man."

This afternoon inaugurated a very disagreeable time. The larboard watch was to a man disaffected, and a feud raged between these men and the six who had stood by the captain and officers.

Nevertheless, the fire, though it did not burst out into a blaze, slumbered. Perhaps it would never have done more than smoulder, but unfortunately there was the material to light it up, the main-spring to set the whole in motion, the head-piece to organize a mutiny.

This head-piece lay in the man known as Richard Hall, or Yellow Dick.

This man had all the qualities for a mutineer or conspirator. He was crafty, unscrupulous, and prudent. Of all the lot, he said the least, but he thought all the more. He was a well-built, powerful man, lean and muscular, and received his nickname of Yellow Dick on account of his complexion—absolutely a gamboge yellow. It seemed as though a bad attack of the jaundice had been fixed on him.

Rodney Ray, whose wits were about him, often noticed him in earnest confabulation with one of his watch. He was too careful, however, to appear to notice it, but, from some expressions let drop, kept his eyes and ears open. Our hero did not fail to mention his suspicions that something was up to Billy-go-easy, but that worthy, after looking out sharp for a couple of days, expressed his opinion that it was fancy. The fact was, Yellow Dick observed great caution when any of the six men whom he considered traitors to the cause, were near. As to Rodney, however, he looked on him as a boy, and was not so careful.

Nothing was said about the allowance of water, but the malecontents absolutely refused to work on the rigging, or do anything except make and shorten sail, and that pretty

much at their own pleasure. The weather rapidly got colder as the ship receded from the equator, and now the shortened allowance was scarcely even an inconvenience.

One night, Rodney, who was a sound sleeper, failed to awake when his watch was called, and lay some quarter of an hour in his bunk. He was aroused quickly by the other watch coming down, and was about starting up in haste, when he caught a word or two which induced him to remain still and feign sleep. Peeping cautiously out of the corner of his eye, he saw Yellow Dick scanning a chart by the light of the fore-castle lamp. He could not hear much of the conversation, for they spoke together in very low tones, but he gathered some few words—

“Wait till he turns her head north.”

“We’re goin’ all right now, and may as well keep quiet.”

“Why not do it and ha’ done wi’ it at once?” said another.

“You infernal fool, it ain’t time yet, I tell you ! Let’s know what we’re doing, and keep dark till the last moment.”

“Where are we now on the chart, Dick ?” asked another.

“Well I can’t say to a degree or so. Couldn’t catch the latitude to-day, when the skipper took the run. Wish I’d got a quadrant.”

“There’s one in the fore-castle.”

“Is there ?”

“Yes—in that young devil’s bunk there. Hallo ! he ain’t turned out.”

It was the ordinary seaman who spoke who was called the Pelican.

Rodney instantly feigned to be fast asleep.

“Hi, there ! rouse up, you young skunk ! Do you know it’s nigh one bell ?”

“Hallo ! eh ! what ! One bell ! Is my watch on deck ?”

“Yes, and you know it well enough, you skulking young hound ! Turn out o’ that.”

Rodney’s blood boiled at being called a skulking young hound, but he judged it prudent to say nothing at the time, and so hurried away as quickly as possible. On the follow

ing day, however, he took the Pelican to task for his insolence. It was in the second dog-watch, and it being a fine evening, the greater number of the men were seated about the forepart of the deck getting their suppers. Pelican was to windward of the galley on a spare topmast, his tea pannikin and plate by his side on the deck. The men of both watches were indiscriminately scattered about, though it was the port watch on deck.

"What do you mean by calling me a skulking hound?" demanded our hero, stalking up to the long-limbed, ill-favoured ordinary seaman.

"Just what I said, so now you've got your answer;" and as he spoke the Pelican reached out his hand for the pannikin full of sweetened tea.

In this case there was certainly a "slip between the cup and the lip," for, quick as thought, Rodney kicked over the pannikin, and followed this up by seizing the tin plate and throwing it overboard, meat and all.

"There goes your supper, my lovely Pelican; it will teach you manners for the future."

Now the Pelican was a great glutton, and when he saw his pint of tea wasted on the deck, and furthermore beheld the plate containing his supper sent spinning overboard, his rage was ungovernable. He was not fond of fighting, as is the case with bullies generally, but anger mastered prudence and, with an inarticulate vent of rage, he rose to his feet, and aimed a heavy blow at the spoiler of his supper, which only partially took effect.

Quick as thought, Rodney squared up, and let his antagonist have a tap on the nose, which fetched blood, and for a moment staggered him. It is a fact worthy of observation that, once committed to a struggle by its absolute commencement, even the most cowardly will fight. This was the case in the present instance, for the Pelican rushed furiously at his smaller opponent, and in the grapple our hero fell undermost being not nearly so heavy as the other.

The row soon brought spectators around; at first principally of Pelican's watch, and of course inclined to favour

him ; but Black-ball Bob and some of Rodney's friends soon appeared on the scene, and then, encouraged by the certainty of having fair play, our hero roused himself for the conflict, and went in to win.

"Blaze away, my lad ; slip into him ; don't give him time to fetch breath ! I'll see fair play !" cried Black-ball Bob and then noticing that some of the port watch were getting suspiciously close to their man, as if with the intention of working in a blow over his shoulders when opportunity offered, added—

"If any living white man, or, for the matter o' that, black man, interferes wi' my watch mate, he'll have to deal wi' us."

And as he spoke, the brawny sailor bared his arms up to the elbow, clenched his iron fist, and looked defiance on all.

A splendid specimen of the human animal was Black-ball Bob ; and each and all of the opposite party admitted to himself that in single fight there was not a man on board who could hope to compete with the gigantic sailor.

Meanwhile, the "mill" went on merrily. Pelican, though the heavier and stronger, could not last ; he had neither the wind, stamina, nor pluck of Rodney, and in five minutes went away to the fore-castle, his eyes black, mouth cut, nose bleeding, and bruised a good deal about the ribs. The victory was a comparatively easy one, and Rodney got great *kudos* for it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LEAH, THE SHAM CABIN-BOY, GIVES A TIMELY WARNING.

SOME two days after this victory Rodney had occasion to go to the bottom of his chest. To his astonishment and indignation, the quadrant given him by the girl Leah was gone.

That it had been stolen there could be no doubt, and now he called to mind the conversation he had overheard. He

was justly angry at the theft of his property, but there were other considerations connected with the affair which impressed him greatly. The vessel was now approaching the southernmost limit to which the captain intended to take her. He gathered from the words he had overheard some days back that when she had gone as far south as necessary an attempt would be made to seize the ship. What they meant to do with her, and whither they meant to take her, he did not know.

First he mentioned his suspicions to Billy-go-easy—that the quadrant had been stolen, not for its value, but as a means of navigating the vessel. He argued that the would-be mutineers had fully resolved to seize her, and had therefore taken care to possess themselves of a quadrant.

But Billy-go-easy did not incline to this hypothesis. He thought that it was purely a theft, and that Rodney's imagination conjured up all the rest.

"Why, what 'ud be the good o' their taking charge o' the ship? What could they do wi' her?—they couldn't sell her; and now-a-days piracy on the high seas ain't a payin' game. No, no, my lad, you may depend upon it you're all wrong. They're a lot o' thundering thieves, that port watch; but as to anything more serious, I don't believe they've the pluck or the sense either."

Rodney was silenced, but not convinced.

Presently he took the opportunity, as the captain was going into the cabin, and spoke to him on the subject.

"Come in, my lad, and say what you have to say."

Rodney followed him in and briefly told him of the loss of his quadrant, and the suspicions he had in his mind as to the intentions of the disaffected portion of the crew.

All the while he was speaking the supposed cabin-boy Leah was listening intently, having crept out of the pantry and noiselessly placed herself behind the mizen-mast. Rodney saw her, but did not think it advisable to take any notice of her presence at that time, as it might seem disrespectful to the captain.

The latter heard him out—thought for a short time—and then gave his opinion.

It coincided in the main with that of Billy-go-easy.

“ I don’t think they’re capable of doing any mischief ; you see we’re too strong for them. I don’t doubt their will, for they’re a scoundrelly hang-dog lot ; but I don’t believe in their pluck and ability.”

“ There’s one among them who knows something of navigation, and seems to take the lead, sir.”

“ Which one is that ? ”

“ Yellow Dick they call him.”

“ All right. I will keep my eye on him. And now about your quadrant. I’ve no doubt it’s been stolen, and is on board the ship of course. But as it will be on board when we get to Calcutta river, I propose to defer any steps until then ; you will be equally certain to recover your property, and by that course we shall avoid any disturbance till we get to the end of our passage. As for those fellows forward, I shall stop all their wages and have them clapped in gaol. I have already made the necessary entries in the log book.”

Rodney merely said, “ You know best, sir,” and made his bow—not without bestowing a smile and glance of recognition on black-eyed Leah.

In spite of all, however, our hero’s suspicions were by no means set at rest. He felt sure that there was something brewing. An ominous quiet seemed to prevail amongst those whom he suspected, and he noticed that they seemed to have a code of signals—to understand each other without written words.

Two days after his interview with the captain, Leah ran out and stopped him as he was going off to take his wheel. It was the second dog-watch, from six to eight in the evening ; and after taking his trick he would, in the usual course of things, turn in till midnight, and then again come on deck to stand the middle watch. The girl was pale, and looked frightened and excited ; her dark eyes flamed, and she was quite trembling with emotion.

"Rodney ! Rodney !—five minutes."

"But it is my wheel, Leah—Billy I mean."

"Never mind ; get someone to take it for you. What I have to say is of importance. I have overheard a conversation between two of the sailors—one of the Spaniards and him they call Yellow Dick."

When Rodney heard this he was at once aware how important it might be.

"Wait a moment, then," he said ; "I will go and ask one of my watch-mates to take my wheel for a bit."

Billy-go-easy, whom he sought out, consented to do so at once, and Rodney returned to the cabin door where the girl was anxiously awaiting him.

"You must be quick, Leah. It won't do for me to be seen standing about talking to you in my watch on deck."

"I won't be five minutes. This afternoon I was down in the store-room, which you know is only separated from the mainhold by a bulkhead. There were two men down there at work, removing some casks or something. When they had finished they sat still and talked. I could, by peeping through a crevice in the bulkhead, make out who they were—and recognized Yellow Dick and Pedro."

"Ah ! and what did they say ?"

"I could not catch everything ; indeed but very little. But this I did make out, that they had some wicked scheme afoot, and were to hold a meeting to decide what was to be done this very night."

"Hold a meeting !—to-night !—when and where ?" he asked.

"In the fore-castle, after twelve o'clock, when you are all on deck."

"Yes, it is our middle watch," said Rodney ; "and you could not hear any more ?"

"No, that was all. What do you think of it ?" she asked, anxiously.

"I don't know yet ; I must take time to consider. I can't stop any longer now. It would excite attention."

"Shall I tell the captain ?"

"No, not yet. I will try and be a witness to their talk to-night. To-morrow I will tell you with what success."

To-morrow! How easily the word was said, and how lightly Rodney spoke it!

To-morrow! What changes in the position of affairs on board the *Windsor Castle* would have taken place!

* * * * *

Rodney went to the wheel, his thoughts intent on what he had just heard. It was fortunate that the ship steered well, or he would have yawed her about fearfully, and perhaps incurred danger of "broaching to." As it was, the captain came aft quickly two or three times, looked at the compass in the binnacle, and then somewhat reproachfully in our hero's face, as though to say—

"Why, my lad, what are you thinking of? You are not steering so well as you usually do."

Rodney decided that he would say nothing to anyone of what Leah had told him, but manage to overhear the conversation in the forecabin that night. It was long ere he hit upon a plan to do so, but did at last. So soon as his wheel was over and he was relieved, he went to the captain and said—

"I'm not well to-night, sir. I've a bad headache. Will you allow me to sleep in—not keep the middle watch?"

"Yes, yes, certainly—I'm not afraid of your skulking, my lad. I fancied there was something wrong, you steered so wildly."

"Thank you, sir." And without another word our hero went forward.

"Billy," said he to his old friend, "I'm going to sleep in to-night. I've got permission from the skipper."

"Why, what's up, my lad—you ain't ill, are you?"

"No, not ill, Billy."

"But never lazy—no, I can't stand that—you ain't done a'most man's work in the way you have to turn skulker now. Splinter me, I won't believe it! That's too much of a scarer."

"No, Billy, I'm not skulking, but I mean to hear what

those fellows of the other watch are talking about to-night I hear from good authority there's a grand palaver on."

"Phew!—I begin to see. You want to be one of the party?"

"Yes—an uninvited guest."

"But they won't talk afore you, p'raps?"

"I don't mean they shall know I'm there. I shall lie close when the watch is called at eight bells to-night. You know my bunk has a canvas curtain which you were kind enough to put up. I think the chance is if I lie quite still they will think I have gone on deck, and go on with their palaver."

"Well, my lad, go your own way. I must own that you've a better head-piece than this old hulk."

And so it was settled.

Rodney was well aware that if they were really going to hold a mutinous council his position would not be without peril. If they discovered him, and suspected he had lain there on purpose, they might possibly make short work of him. However, he had begun the affair and meant to go through with it; so he turned in, after arranging with Billy-go-easy that he should be called quietly at midnight, and then the canvas curtain was drawn carefully over the bunk.

At midnight the watch was called as usual, but Rodney, after being awakened, lay quite still. Shortly he heard the men of the other watch descend one by one. Presently, also, the two malcontents in his own watch, Carl Schrader and Yellow Dick, came down.

Then the hatch was partly drawn over the fore scuttle, and the top tarpaulin over that. This was nothing unusual, for it was now very cold and spray was often thrown up over the bows. But Rodney knew in a very short time that something important was in the wind.

The men spoke in low voices and not one offered to turn in.

About one bell he heard some one say, "Now, then, capt'n, take command, and let's get to business."

The voice was that of George Gatton, and when he who

had been addressed as captain replied, Rodney knew that it was Yellow Dick.

Then ensued the following conversation, nearly every word of which our hero could hear.

Yellow Dick.—Well, shipmates, we've come to a determination not to put up with any more of this infernal tyranny and starvation?

All.—Yes, yes—go ahead.

Yellow Dick.—Such being the fact, there's no time to be lost. We're now well away to the east, and her course ought to be altered to sou'-sou'-west instanter. There's the chart.

The chart was brought, and there was silence, broken only by occasional mutterings, as the captain elect of the mutineers. for such Rodney knew him to be, pricked off the position of the vessel.

Yellow Dick.—This is where she is, lads—where I've stuck that black pin in.

Diego. (The concealed listener recognized each man by his voice as he spoke.)—*Carramba!* too far east, seems to me.

Yellow Dick.—No harm done, mate. I told you sou'-sou'-west will fetch where we want to go.

Joe Smith, the Yankee.—Well, it seems to me as this ain't a matter o' much importance. What we've got to do is to get hold o' the ship—let's do it at once—that's what I say.

Yellow Dick.—You're right, Joe. I was just going to say the same. I've broached it to most of you, and now I want to know if any one's got anything to say ag'in the job bein' done right off to-night?

There was a silence for a short time. Though all these men had been for weeks plotting to mutiny, and seize the ship, now that it was brought home to them so closely—to be done at once—they felt, many of them, a slight shrinking back.

Yellow Dick.—I am for doing it right off. What say you, Joe?

Joe Smith.—Ay, let's have it over.

Yellow Dick.—Now lads, we'll put it to the vote. Who's

for seizing the ship to-night ? Let every man hold up his hand that's willing.

Joc Smith and Pedro were first to hold up their hands, and one by one the others all followed ; the last, who felt inclined to hang back, being urged on by shame.

There were present the eight able seamen of the watch, besides Schrader and Yellow Dick of the starboard watch, and Hall, or the Pelican, the ordinary seaman—making eleven in all. Rodney, listening intently, heard the voice of every one reply in the affirmative when the mutineer captain proceeded to put the question to each individually, as to whether he was willing to make one.

After this was satisfactorily settled there was a good deal of desultory conversation one among the other. He heard the metallic sound of knives and the click of pistols, which announced the fact that many of them were armed, and were examining their weapons.

“ How about powder ? ” asked one.

“ Oh, we're all right there. There's two kegs right under the main hold. I broached one, and filled a biggish bag, when I was at work securing the cargo to-day.”

“ Where is it ? ” asked Yellow Dick.

Rodney listened intently, thinking that in the course of events it might be possible to deprive them of this.

But as he heard the answer he felt that it was all but a vain hope, for they would doubtless keep good guard on it.

“ It's in the foretop, stowed in the main-topmast-staysail,” was the reply.”

“ What about the skipper ? ”

“ Oh, we must secure him in the cabin, with the steward, and the mate too as soon as he goes below.”

“ And what about the second mate ? ”

“ Why, he'll go on deck when we do—four of us must steal off by the chain and two jump out on him, while two more fix the man at the wheel just when he's expecting to be relieved.”

“ Suppose they resist—fight hard—any of 'em ? ”

"Well, there's little doubt what's to be done in that case—split their skulls, and chuck 'em overboard, of course."

"I ain't ~~at~~ no killing whatsoever," said Bill Bloxam.

"But if it can't be avoided?" asked Yellow Dick.

"You'd rather some one else be killed than you, I suppose?"

"Well, yes—but not if it can be helped."

"You're mighty tender-hearted," sneered Joe Smith.

"Mebbe I am—anyhow, I'm ag'in it. I know a man as I sailed wi' once as was haunted all his life by the ghost of a second mate he killed."

Ultimately it was agreed that there should be no unnecessary murder. If any of the other party were foolish enough to resist in earnest, then they would be killed as a matter of course. This desultory confabulation was carried on until past four bells, but then, as there seemed no end to it, Yellow Dick again assumed the command, and prepared to address the assembly.

"Now, my lads, you're all agreed that it's to be done to-night?"

This having been previously settled, of course every one answered yes.

"And that in the carrying out of this business I'm to be captain?"

"Yes, yes," said one; "'tain't the first time, Dick; you've done this sort o' thing afore, I know."

"Ay, and mebbe made some o' them walk the plank arter it was all over," put in another of this amiable party.

Yellow Dick smiled at the complimentary allusion to himself as having been previously a pirate and a murderer.

"Well, boys, then, if you'll listen I'll tell you my plan. I've had it all chalked out days ago."

"Ah, you have got a head-piece, Dick."

"Don't interrupt. So soon as the watch is called we all go on deck. Neither the wheel nor the lock-out must be relieved at once. It must be a long relief. When the other watch has gone below, the second mate, the man at the wheel, and the look-out, must be seized and bound all together. Two must stand sentry over the foksle, and be ready to clap

on the hatch the minute the row begins, for there's sure to be a bit of a disturbance, do it as well as we may. Well, soon as the second mate and the man at the wheel's fixed, then some of us must make a rush on the cabin, and secure the skipper, mate, and steward. When that's done there'll be only the carpenter, and the rest of the starboard watch, and they'll be safe enough under hatches. When it's all done, we shall get the handcuffs from the cabin, and come down and fix them so as they can't be up to mischief."

"What about the muskets in the cabin? they're ranged round the mizenmast."

"Why of course we shall seize them on the first rush. We've got plenty of powder and bullets, too."

"Suppose the skipper and mate are awake and hear the 'muss'?"

"Why, if the worst comes to the worst, we can always bar them up in the cabin by blocking up the skylight, and rolling casks and coils of rope against the door."

"Suppose they break out—there's three of them, besides the passengers and the boy, and you may depend they've got plenty of pistols and ammunition?"

"Well, we've got plenty of powder. Then there's the two little cannons. We can train one on each side of the deck, so as to command the cuddy doors—that'll stop 'em from breaking out, I'll warrant."

"There's powder, but no shot for the cannon."

"We can ram home a bag of nails. There's plenty of 'em among the carpenter's stores."

Thus every objection of the more timorous was promptly met by Yellow Dick. Evidently he had well considered the situation and the chances for and against.

"It seems all plain sailing, and easy enough," put in Bill Bloxam.

"Who's going to tackle the man at the wheel, the lookout, and the second mate?"

"Why, it don't matter," said Yellow Dick, sharply; "any of us can manage that—you'll be plenty for the helms-

man and the second mate, and I'll engage to deal with the look-out."

"The second mate's a strong young fellow, and will show fight."

"So much the worse for him! If he's troublesome--split his head open and chuck him overboard," said the captain of the mutineers, coolly.

"Who's at the wheel when we go on deck?"

"Black-ball Bob," some one replied.

There was a dead silence.

"Who's going to tackle Black-ball Bob?" asked Bloxam--the man who objected to blood being shed; "I'm no cur, but I own right out that I don't care about it. He's as strong as a team o' horses. No two or three men can tackle him, and bind him fast, I know."

"It's easy enough if he's took unawares," said Yellow Dick.

"Very well, then, you try it; I don't seem to care about the journey."

"A clip over the head wi' a handspike would settle the matter sharp enough."

"Yes, and maybe kill the man; tell you I won't ha' no killin' execept it comes to the worst, and we can't help it."

Bill Bloxam had a party of two or three with him, and Yellow Dick therefore saw the necessity of temporizing. Still, however, it was obvious that not one among them relished the idea of tackling Black-ball Bob. It was not altogether the great size and strength of the stalwart sailor which caused this, but a certain prestige which hung about him.

He had once been set on by hired rowdies, half a dozen of them together, and disabled them all, injuring one so badly that he died next day. Then, again, on shipboard, he fought two men for half an hour, and, though his right arm was broken by a blow from a handspike, came off victor. The boatswain, carpenter, and mate of the ship *Flying Cloud* once undertook to put him in irons; but Bob the Blazer threw the carpenter overboard, knocked down the boatswain,

and jumped on him, and made the mate run aft for his life. Altogether, what with traditions and sailors' yarns, Bob had a terrible reputation, and not one of them cared about attempting to secure him.

It really seemed at one time as though this might cause a break-up of the whole mutiny ; but, unfortunately, one of the Germans—Carl Schrader—who belonged to the starboard watch, informed the company that Big Bob would not be at the wheel—that his trick was the one immediately before.

All this while our friend Rodney lay perfectly still, drinking in every word ; fearful each moment of being discovered, and desperately racking his brains as to what he should do when they went on deck.

He was aware of their intended plan of action, privy to the minutest detail of the mutiny, but how was he to make his knowledge available.

Rush on deck and give the alarm ?

No ! He heard the ringleader—Yellow Dick—order the men who ought to relieve the man at the wheel and the lookout to remain below until the other watch came down. Then they were to go up the ladder and post themselves as sentries at the hatch, armed with a “ norman ” lash from the windlass, and await the signal to clap on the hatch.

So, obviously, any attempt of the kind on his part would be only running into useless danger.

Presently, however, by a train of thought he hit on a plan which he thought might prove successful. He remembered how the girl Leah had first warned him of the meeting to be held this very night by the mutineers, and that she had derived her information from overhearing a conversation between two of them in the hold, while she was in the storeroom, or *lazaretto* as it is called. He remembered that the fore-castle was only divided from the hold by a bulkhead forward, as was the store-room aft. The hold contained principally cases and crates of general ware, and in no place was it stored right up to the deck above. In all probability it would be possible to crawl from forward aft if once an opening could be made in the bulkhead.

Now, among the presents which Leah Jacobs made our hero, before the night of his hapless discovery by her father, was a large knife, with numerous blades, as also a file, chisel, and saw. With this he felt sure he could cut a plank out of the bulkhead in five minutes. But he dared not move.

What was to be done ?

At present nothing. So he lay still and listened to the plans of the mutineers—plans which were to be very shortly put into practice.

They talked together until after seven bells, when the captain elect—Yellow Dick—again assumed command, and proceeded to assign to each man his post.

“ Carl Schrader and the other man of the starboard watch, you’ll stop down, and as soon as the first of ’em comes down go on deck. They haven’t missed you out of the watch yet, so that’s all right.”

The two men signified that they understood, and were prepared to take their post, which, as had been before arranged, was to keep watch over the fore scuttle, and prevent any one from coming up after all the watch had gone below.

“ Bloxam, Diego, Santa Anna, and Pedro, will tackle the second mate and man at the wheel. Two of you had better creep round outside by the chains, while one goes on over the poop as if to relieve the wheel ; then, while he’s talking to the helmsman for a minute or two, the other’ll come up accidental like—as if he’d made a mistake and thought it was his trick. Then all at once the second mate and the man at the wheel must be tackled ; but not before I whistle, which will mean that the fore scuttle’s on, and all ready to secure the skipper, mate, and passengers.

“ Now, then, about the look-out,” he went on, when each man hitherto named had signified that he understood what he had to do, and was prepared to do it. “ Gatton and I will take him, and as soon as he’s all safe and made fast, I’ll whistle on the boatswain’s pipe I’ve got. Then you fellows on the poop must wire in, and at the same time Schrader and his mate will clap the hatch on the forecastle. Then

there'll be only the carpenter, and you, Pelican, can jam up the door of his berth with a marlin-spike, so as he can't get out. As for the cook, he's with us, so that's all right.

"Well, then there'll be nothing to do but deal with the skipper, mate, and passengers. Two of us will step for'ard and see all quiet, while the rest take the cabin with a rush. They can't do any good if we're quick about it. There'll be ten of us against the three—the skipper, mate, and steward. As for the passengers, they're no account at all. It's all in our favour—we've got the advantage in numbers and every other way. We shall take 'em unawares with a rush, and in a quarter of an hour the ship will be ours."

"And what shall we do with the fellows down the fokse?" asked Bloxam, who seemed by far the most cautious, not to say the most timorous, of the lot.

"Do wi' 'em? Ha! ha! I know how to fix 'em. I ain't forgot 'em; tell you what we'll do—we'll take the hatch off—a man standing each side wi' a handspike, and make 'em come up one by one."

"Suppose they won't come up?"

"Bah—they must. If they won't, I knows' how to make 'em."

"How?"

"Why, smoke 'em out. There's lots o' dry shavings. All we'd have to do would be to make some good, big tar-balls, light 'em, and chuck 'em down."

Yellow Dick was prepared at all points, and had an answer to every objection. Our hero as he listened felt a kind of admiration for this man—so fertile in expedients, so quiet, self-possessed, and withal so determined.

Clang-clang—clang-clang—clang-clang—clang-clang!

Eight bells!

The hour had come!

CHAPTER XXIV.

MEASURES FOR DEFENCE.

RODNEY's heart beat fast as he heard the sonorous clanging of the bell. The conversation was suddenly hushed, and the hidden witness knew that each man was seeing to his arms. Then came the hail down the scuttle.

"Ahoy ! Eight bells—turn out, you sleepers !"

Rodney lay silent and motionless, but in a state of great nervous excitement. One by one he heard them mount the ladder and go on deck. He counted each as he ascended, in order to know when they were all up, as he dared not move the curtain covering his bunk to look out. As soon as the last man had ascended he sprang from the bunk, and hastening to his chest he took out the big knife with the saw and chisel given him by Leah. Just as he opened this Billy-go-easy and another man came down. Rodney was trembling with excitement, with the perspiration standing out on his forehead.

"Quick, Billy—quick—lend me a hand to cut through this bulkhead !"

"Why, what's the matter ? What the devil ails the lad ?" cried the old sailor.

"Matter—matter enough ; they're going to seize the ship."

At this moment Black-ball Bob and two other men came down. There were now five in the forecastle. The look-out and the man at the wheel were still not relieved, according to the preconcerted arrangement which our hero had overheard. The other two men he well knew were on the side of the mutineers, so that the little band of five now together in the forecastle were alone, and could expect no further aid.

"Why, what the blazes is up ?" cried Black-ball Bob on hearing the last words. "Seize the ship ! I'd like to see 'em at it."

"Hush, for Heaven's sake !" cried Rodney, in a hoarse

whisper ; “ our only chance is by breaking through into the hold.”

Having heard all their plans, he was enabled to form a correct estimate of the danger.

“ There are two men standing over the scuttle, each with an iron “ norman,” he went on, as Black-ball Bob seemed inclined to go on deck at all hazards.

“ The devil there are ! I’ll see.”

“ No, no, don’t—the moment you show your head above deck you’ll be struck down.”

His manner was so earnest, and he so evidently spoke as one who knew, that Black-ball Bob, reckless as he was, paused.

“ Right you are, my lad ; I’ll play possum a bit.”

So saying, the sailor half mounted the ladder and called out—

“ On deck you there, just chuck me down my oil jacket ; it’s on the windlass end !”

There came a growling response, and in a few moments the jacket was thrown down—not, however, before Bob had managed to take a quick glance around, popping up his head for a second only.

What he saw convinced him that Rodney was right.

Meanwhile, our hero and Bill-go-easy—who fully appreciated the imminence of the peril, knowing as he did that the lad had been lying concealed in his bunk during the whole watch, and had, of course, heard everything—were working away with desperate energy at the bulkhead which divided the forecastle from the hold. A plank was soon partially sawn through and started, then another ; and in five minutes from the time when the watch came down there was a hole leading from the foot of Rodney’s bunk to the forehold, large enough to admit the passage of a man.

At this moment was heard a scuffle on deck, and then the fore scuttle was cautiously put on—not so quietly, however, but they heard it and knew what it meant, especially as, in addition to fastening by means of the bar, it was further secured by piling on it heavy objects, such as coils of rope.

"The infernal white-livered swabs!" cried Bob, furiously "they think they've got us caged in a hole like rats, I suppose."

"Hush!" said Billy-go-easy; "hand me the light, Bob, we'll break through into the cabin and be alongside the skipper in no time."

Rodney now crawled through the aperture and landed amongst the cargo in the forehold.

"Give me the light, Billy."

The oil lamp which usually hung in the fore-castle was handed to him, so as to throw a light for those who were to follow him.

Billy-go-easy crawled through, and so did Black-ball Bob and the other two men; and the five now stood together in the narrow space between the cargo and the deck above.

Rodney, carrying the light crawled along, just making his way over boxes, barrels, crates, and cases, not without some difficulty.

Arrived nearly under the main hatch, there was a sudden stoppage, and some heavy cases of wine had to be moved ere the little party could proceed.

Right under the main hatch there was a large open space or pit cleared, and jumping down into this, our hero commenced searching around, holding the light over his head.

"What's up, my lad?" asked Billy-go-easy; "hadn't we better push along?"

"The powder, Billy—the powder—I heard 'em say there were some barrels somewhere under the main hatch. We may want it. Anyhow, we cannot leave it for them."

"Right, my lad," cried Billy approvingly, "you've got a head—you are a scarer. I know where the powder-kegs are; I was down in the hold storing some of the passengers' luggage and came across it."

The barrels were found after a search, which, however, occupied several minutes of valuable time, and again the party of five commenced crawling along towards the bulk-head of the store-room, which, when they broke through, would enable them to ascend into the cabin.

Rodney Ray, as the smallest, went first crawling along over cargo, with frequent stoppages, when he was obliged to put down the oil lamp, the only light in the dark hold, and call the assistance of the others to help him clear a path.

They could now hear a trampling and commotion on the deck above, and knew that the mutiny was in active progress. Leaving them thus persistently working their way aft, burrowing like rats or moles beneath the feet of the mutineers, we will see how the conspiracy succeeded.

CHAPTER XXV.

OUTBREAK OF THE MUTINY.

THE plan matured by Yellow Dick, the leader of the mutineers, and universally adopted by his confederates, was one which had all the elements of success. The mutineer chief had not come to a decision hastily ; the way in which the ship was to be seized had been with him a subject of earnest thought for many days, and when, after rejecting many other plans, he hit upon the present one, he felt well satisfied that he had chosen the best means for success.

By seizing and binding the officers and crew in detail, he deemed a failure all but impossible ; that is, if their hearts failed them not at the right moment.

As to what were the plans of the mutineers, they were plain enough. They intended to put all those of the crew, not of their own party, into the boats, and let them take their chance of reaching a haven of safety ; while, as for the vessel, they intended to plunder her of everything valuable and then run her ashore near the port in the gold colony of Victoria, Australia. They would then take all the valuables they could, and give out that the rest of the crew and the officers perished when the vessel was wrecked, which they would represent was purely by accident.

Then they would make their way to the nearest town, divide the money, and dispose of what valuables they had plundered ; and then seek their fortunes as they chose, either singly or in parties.

However, all the conspirators are finally agreed, and immediately after the calling of the watch, go on deck—not hurriedly, but quietly, and in good order.

Acting according to the directions of the mutineer chief, they clustered about the foremast until the four sailors had gone below.

"Where's the boy—what's-his-name?" asked Yellow Dick, as he watched Big Bob, Billy-go-easy, and the other two down.

"I expect he slipped down without your seeing him."

"Ay, or else he's asleep about the deck somewhere."

"It's no matter ; now, men, to your stations. Two of you over the fore-hatch, and when I give the word, clap it on—not before. Bill Bloxam, you and I will take the look-out ; Diego, Santa Anna, and Joe Smith, creep round aft outside the ship—Pedro, you go aft, as if to relieve the wheel, and throw yourselves all together on the second mate and the helmsman. Here, take this coil of rope, and bind them fast instantly. Threaten to kill them if they resist or make an outcry."

All this was said in a low voice, little above a whisper.

"Ay, ay," and with the muttered reponse, the four men moved away, three creeping over the bulwarks, and one walking boldly along the quarter-deck, and over the poop.

Yellow Dick waited till he could see the heads of three of them in the mizen-chains, and the fourth standing close to the binnacle.

"On with the fore-scuttle," he said in a low tone.

His orders were instantly obeyed, and then, with his own hands, he threw a couple of heavy coils of rope on it, and secured it with the bar.

The look-out man was leaning on the capstan, whistling and looking ahead. Yellow Dick vaulted lightly on to the top of the forecastle, and Bill Bloxam following the example,

before the seaman who had the look-out was aware of the least danger he was seized by either arm by Bill Bloxam, while Yellow Dick flourished a knife threateningly before his eyes.

"If you resist or cry out, you are a dead man."

Thus taken unawares and at a disadvantage, the man had no opportunity to resist, and in a few seconds was securely bound. Then Yellow Dick blew shrilly on the boatswain's pipe, and instantly there was heard the sound of a scuffle on the poop. He and Bloxam at once ran aft to render assistance if necessary, leaving two as guards over the fore-scuttle, and two to see the carpenter did not break out from his berth, where he was nailed up. Thus the whole ten were disposed about the deck—four forward and six aft.

When Yellow Dick and Bloxam got on the poop they found that there the struggle was over. The second mate had offered some resistance, and Pedro, the Spaniard, had at once knocked him down with a handspike. This, with the odds against him, had so far intimidated the man at the wheel that he made no resistance, and both were quickly and securely bound.

Meanwhile all was quiet in the cabin. The deck had been gained by the mutineers, and every one not on their side secured without alarming the captain, mate, or passengers.

"Now for the cabin. First, however, let's take these two fellows forward."

The second mate and the seaman who had been overpowered at the wheel were made to walk forward, their arms being tightly bound, while Yellow Dick marched beside one and Bloxam the other, each with a pistol in his hand.

"It's no use your making any outcry," said the ringleader. "It will only get you another knock on the head. The captain, mate, and passengers, are already secured."

This, though not true, was believed by the second mate and the man, so that in place of calling out, as they might perhaps have done, they walked quietly forward, and with the man who had been seized on the look-out were placed in the galley and a guard set over them.

Now came the task of securing the captain and mate. This would be most dangerous, because each would have arms handy, and if attacked might use them.

"Now, lads, come on. Let's make a rush for it."

Accordingly, six of them, led by Yellow Dick, went quietly and swiftly aft, and halted at the cuddy door. Yellow Dick, making a sign of silence, cautiously entered the cabin. The others were about following him, when he suddenly started slightly, and gave vent to a slight exclamation. He dashed out of the cabin, still facing aft.

"By —— we're betrayed," he said, in a low tone, when he got outside.

"Betrayed!"

"Yes! they're prepared for us. I saw that young whelp of a boy standing at the door of the after-cabin with a musket in his hand. I saw another behind him too."

"What's to be done?"

"They don't know we've seen they're ready. Their game is to let us come into the cabin unsuspecting like, and then make us prisoners. But we'll beat them yet. Quick with that water-cask. Two of you jump on the poop, and fasten down the skylight. When I give the word, bang the cabin door, and roll the cask up against it. Cast it off quick. Are you ready?"

He spoke quickly, and in tones of nervous excitement; but for all that he knew what he was doing, for he kept his eye sharply fixed on the interior of the cabin.

All being in readiness, the word was given. The cabin door was banged to, and almost instantly the cask rolled against it and firmly wedged there.

Instantaneously, with a shout, there rushed from behind the mizenmast the captain, mate, the four men who had been imprisoned in the forecabin, and our hero, Rodney.

Their plan had been, as Yellow Dick at once divined, to lure the mutineers into the cabin, and there make prisoners of them. But through the unfortunate circumstance of Rodney's being seen, their leader had taken the alarm, and it

was now attempted to fasten them up. Unfortunately, this was but too easily done.

The skylight was securely fastened down in a moment or so, and the cabin-door opening on the quarter-deck was also barricaded by a great water-cask, on the top of which the mutineers were busy piling everything they could lay hands on.

"Come on, boys, we'll soon burst out of this. The fools! Do they think we're going to let them fasten us up this way?"

Black-ball Bob, the speaker, thereupon rushed forward, and with the butt-end of his musket struck vigorously at the door. The splinters of wood flew in all directions, and the door was being rapidly demolished. When this had been accomplished it would not have been difficult to remove the water-cask, and obstructions, by using the muskets, of which there were plenty, as levers.

A shout of defiance now arose from the mutineers, and the voice of Yellow Dick was heard crying—

"Fire into the cabin! Blaze away, my boys! Shoot Black-ball Bob."

Instantly the crack of pistols was heard above the yells of the mutineers, and several bullets whizzed past Bob's head. The mate, who was behind him, fell with a deep groan, shot in the shoulder, and the captain was also wounded slightly in the right arm. The bullets flew thick and fast about, and though no one else was wounded, it was evident by the splintering of the panels of the cabin doors, and the hiss of these spiteful little bits of lead, that the position was untenable.

The light from the cabin lamp revealed their position to the mutineers, while they, on their part, were sheltered by the darkness. By the rapidity of the discharges it was but too evident that there were some revolvers among their weapons, and it also seemed as though there could be no scarcity of ammunition, or they would not thus have lavished it.

An instant or two after the fall of the chief mate

the volley was returned by those in the cabin, each one firing his musket. This discharge made much noise, but did no damage, as was sufficiently proved by the mocking shouts and cries of the mutineers.

Then followed a slow, desultory firing on behalf of the possessors of the deck.

Another man, one of the sailors, was hit in the chest, the ball, however, fortunately glancing off the rib. He had rushed forward bravely but rashly, intending to remove the water-cask and other obstructions. The instant that he showed in front a half-dozen bullets whistled around him, one of which put him *hors de combat*.

There were thus three wounded already of the defenders of the cabin.

Captain Scott himself, bleeding profusely from the arm, saw that the mutineers had the advantage in position, and that to attempt to break out as at present situated would only result in certain and useless loss of life.

"Keep back, boys; get behind the mizen-mast, into the after-cabin. Come here, out of the light. It will soon be daylight; then the tables will be turned."

"Suppose we put out the lights, captain?" suggested the steward. "Then we shall be on more equal terms."

"No. In a confined space like this our best chance is to stand together and act together. They have more men, and also light enough on deck to see what they are doing."

Accordingly a retreat was made behind the mizen-mast and to the darker part of the cabin. The women, who now made a terrible uproar by screaming and crying, were placed in the starboard stern-cabin, while Captain Scott ordered all the muskets and ammunition to be taken into the larboard one.

"Load all the muskets. Let two men stand behind the mizen-mast on watch, and the rest be prepared to rush out and repel the enemy if they should attempt to storm the cabin."

These brief and sensible orders were at once attended to, and then Captain Scott, himself wounded, proceeded to attend to the mate and the sailor who had also been hit. The

chief officer had received a bullet which, striking the shoulder where the arm joined, had buried itself deep in the flesh. There was very little bleeding, but the ball could not be extracted, and the pain was intense—so much so that in half an hour he became quite delirious. As for the sailor, his wound was not serious, but it bled profusely, and so weakened him as to render him almost powerless. Thus, at the very beginning of the struggle—in the first brief skirmish, as it were—three were wounded and two placed *hors de combat*.

There now remained unhurt only Billy-go-easy, Black-ball Bob, our hero, and another sailor, besides the steward. There were, it is true, three male passengers; but they were old men, and quite unfit and unable to take any efficient part. As for the women, they proved a terrible encumbrance, wailing and crying, and tending to unnerve their defenders.

Not all, though. There was one—a delicate girl, albeit in the garb of a boy—whose spirit rose with the occasion. This was no other than the supposed cabin-boy, Leah.

She watched the men loading the muskets for a time, and then, when she understood the process, took one herself, bit off the end of the cartridge, poured the powder in, and then rammed home the bullet. This musket she handed to Rodney Ray.

“Take it; I am not afraid, and I am sure you are not.”

“Water! water!—get me water!” groaned the chief mate, for whom a bed had been hastily prepared; “I am so thirsty.”

There was no water in the cabin, except some which was in a filter which stood on the sideboard at the forward end, and quite close to the door.

Any one advancing there would be in full view of the mutineers, whose forms could be dimly discerned moving about on the deck.

The men gazed in each other's faces as the wounded man cried again and again for water to quench his burning thirst.

“Shall we make a rush, captain?” asked Black-ball Bob; “we can't let the poor feller parch in thirst.”

The skipper appeared to consider a bit.

"I suppose we must," he said ; "but I expect it will draw another volley from them. I can see that scoundrel, Yellow Dick, peeping out from behind the mainmast every now and again, watching like a cat for a mouse to show his head out of his hole. It can't be helped, however."

"Captain, I will get some water."

"You !"

It was the cabin-boy who thus volunteered—Leah Jacobs, in fact, as the reader knows.

"Yes—they will never shoot a boy like me."

Then, without further parley, the supposed cabin-boy quietly stepped out into the cabin, and advanced towards the forward part.

The gray light of day was just beginning to dawn, and from the dark recesses of the larboard after-cabin they could see a stir among the possessors of the deck.

"Look out, boy," shouted Bob ; "they're agoin' to shoot at ye."

He had seen one of those on the quarter-deck raise his pistol as if about to fire.

But the cabin-boy held up his hand, and spoke—

"Men, you will not shoot me. I am coming to get water for one who is wounded."

Her words had the desired effect, and she was permitted to fill the jug she held from the filter on the sideboard, with which she safely returned to the after-cabin.

"You're a d—d plucky young fellow, namby-pamby as you look," cried Big Bob, approvingly, and roughly slapping the cabin-boy on the back.

"Leah," whispered Rodney, in his admiration of her heroism, "I like you better this moment than ever I did before."

The girl's eyes brightened up, and her cheeks flushed, and it was evident that she was intensely gratified by the few words our hero said.

"My girl," said the captain, in a low tone, so that no one else could hear, "you shipped as a cabin-boy, but you've the heart of a heroine."

And yet there was not so very much in the act. It was more the motive, and the calm, quiet way in which this seeming boy went about it, which impressed every one.

It soon became but too apparent that the mate was dying. The bullet had penetrated the cavity of the chest, and he was bleeding internally. He was quite delirious, and coughed up blood frequently, showing that the lungs were injured.

Slowly the morning dawned, and ere the shades of night gave way to the early twilight the first officer turned over on his side, struggled for a few moments in the last agony, and then breathed his last.

The captain, who was bending over him, holding his hand, and feeling his fast-fading pulse, was the first to be aware of the fact.

"Men," he said, "Mr. Hayes is dead—let us kneel and pray."

Then every man knelt, and the two sentries behind the mizen-mast doffed their caps, though they could not relax their vigilance.

The dead man was laid on his back, and covered up with a flag from the locker on which he lay. The day was now breaking fast, and it behoved the living to be stirring.

Captain Scott resolved to go forward and parley with the mutineers; at the same time he would have an opportunity of reconnoitring the state of affairs, whilst he ascertained what were the aims and intentions of the mutineers.

"But they'll shoot you, sir," said Rodney.

"Well, my boy," replied the skipper, gravely, "I can't help it if they do. I am the captain of this ship, and am responsible for all of you. I must do my duty, even though I lose my life."

Thus speaking he stepped out and advanced towards the front of the cabin.

Rodney ran after him.

"Won't you take a musket, captain?"

"No, my lad, it would only exasperate them."

And he calmly and resolutely marched towards the door,

which was nearly demolished, but barricaded by the water cask and other things, about breast-high.

It was now broad daylight.

They saw him as soon as he got near the light, and there was an immediate commotion.

The sailors crouching in the after-cabin, shrouded by the darkness, passed each man a musket, and a stern resolve pervaded every one: to rush out—if the brave captain should be shown conquer, avenge him, or perish.

But the mutineers seemed inclined to listen to what the captain had to say.

"I wish to speak," he said, advancing boldly up to the broken door, through which he could have been shot down at any moment. "Who is ringleader among you?"

"I am," replied Yellow Dick, defiantly, as he advanced towards him, "and the sooner you give up the better. We know that we wounded some of you, and we're more than two to one, and quite as well armed."

"Richard Hall, you are already a murderer, whether the fatal shot was fired by you or not. Mr. Hayes, the chief mate, is dead, and you, as the armed ringleader of this mutiny, are responsible."

"And suppose I put a bullet through you now as you stand—there'll be another one out of the way, and I shall be responsible, I suppose; reckon that don't trouble me much."

"You can shoot me if you please. I do not fear you. I came forward unarmed to know what your intentions are."

"Intentions! why, we mean to have the ship, to be sure. Don't suppose we are going to be half-starved and stinted in the water to please you."

Captain Scott took no notice of his words, but went on—

"Now, look here, men; there can be only one end to this, if you go on. You are guilty, all of you, of piracy on the high seas, by attempting to seize the ship, and the punishment is, as you know, by the laws of England, the gallows. You cannot expect to succeed. We are well armed and united, and to persist is only to bring ruin on yourselves and end in useless bloodshed. If you will lay down your arms and

return to your duty, I will promise you forgiveness, so far as I am concerned."

"So far as you are concerned!" said Yellow Dick. "What's the good of talking nonsense? What about the mate that's shot? You know as well as I do, skipper, that the moment we get into an English port, we should be marched off to gaol, the whole lot of us. So stash it, if that's all you've got to say."

There was much truth in this. Of course the killing of the mate was an act of murder, and no one, save the Queen, had the prerogative to grant pardon.

"Well, look here, men. Anyhow, you're only making things worse. Surrender, lay down your arms, and go back to your duty, and I, on my part, will promise to make things as easy and pleasant as I can, and if, when we arrive in port, you all make a bolt of it, I shan't try to stop you."

This was a very liberal offer, and one which strictly the captain had no right to make. The mutineers were criminals and murderers, and it was his duty to deliver them over to the authorities so soon as the ship arrived in port.

But, liberal as it was, it had no effect.

"Now, look here, skipper, it's no use your palavering. You want to take the ship to Calcutta, and we mean to take her somewhere else."

"Villains! you shall never take command of this ship while I'm alive," the captain cried, furiously.

"Then we'll do it after you're dead. It's no odds to us," replied Yellow Dick.

"Once more, I command you to lay down your arms."

"And once more, we'll see you d——d first; and in return I command you to come out of the cabin, one by one, and surrender to us."

"Never!"

"We'll make you. Blaze away, boys!"

Instantly was heard again the crash of pistols, as with loud yells the mutineers suddenly appeared from behind the mainmast and other places of concealment, and fired into the cabin.

The captain at the first fire fell, and those in the after-cabin thought, at first, that he was wounded. But that was not the case. At the first fire he had fallen on his knees beneath the level of the water-cask and obstructions, so as not to expose his body unnecessarily.

The fire was immediately returned from the muskets of the sailors aft, and though apparently not one of the mutineers was hit, the volley effectually cleared the deck.

It was now broad daylight, and a council of war was held among the defenders of the cabin. There were then only the three seamen, the steward, Rodney Ray, and the captain—six in all, against eleven of the mutineers—for the black cook had joined them.

The best course to pursue, it was decided, would be to act with extreme caution, and not risk the killing or wounding of any more of their small party.

They had a great advantage over the rebels in the possession of muskets, with which a much steadier aim could be taken than with pistols.

Two of the little party were placed behind the mizen-mast, and directed to keep a sharp look-out on the part of the deck visible through the windows in the front part of the cabin, and the aperture in the shattered door above the water-cask and the obstructions. Rodney Ray's turn came, and, musket in hand, he stood patiently for nearly an hour without getting more than a fleeting glimpse of any of the enemy.

All at once, however, he saw a man's figure mount the rail and ascend into the fore-rigging. It was Yellow Dick, who had mounted a few ratlines in order to get a good view round the horizon. He was well in view as he stood shading his eyes from the morning sun and peering around. Rodney, without saying a word, dropped on his knee, and resting the barrel of his rifle on the back of a chair, took deliberate aim and fired.

A cry of pain and dismay, and the sudden disappearance of the figure from the fore-rigging, convinced him that he had hit his man.

A few seconds afterwards the mutineers suddenly rushed aft and poured in the contents of their pistols, fortunately without wounding any one. A volley from five muskets soon cleared the deck again, and the defenders of the cabin had reason to think that at least one bullet had taken effect, for again a sharp cry was heard, as though some one had been hit.

Now that it was daylight, they had greatly the advantage. The state cabin dead-lights had been put up, so that the after-part of the cuddy was very dark, and thus there was afforded no opportunity for the enemy to take aim; whilst they, on the other hand, being out on the deck, could be plainly seen. The only way they could move about without drawing a fire was by crawling on their hands and knees.

The mutineers soon became aware of this advantage possessed by the cabin party, and hastened to do all they could to counteract it.

Yellow Dick was by no means wanting in cunning, as the sequel showed.

A trampling was shortly heard overhead, and a hauling on ropes, which caused the captain to be anxious to know what they were doing.

So Rodney, handing his musket to Leah, who bravely stood beside him while it was his turn for sentry duty behind the mizen-mast, crawled on his hands and knees to the forward-part of the cabin.

He saw through a part of the skylight which was not blocked up that some of the mutineers were at work on the poop. At first he could not make out what they were doing, but at last discovered and reported to the captain.

"They're unbending the spanker, sir."

"Unbending the spanker! What can be their object—are they going to strip the ship of her sails?"

Their intentions, however, were gradually unfolded. The prisoners in the cabin heard the sail being dragged along over their heads, and then suddenly it was dropped over the head of the poop so as to shut out all view of the quarter-deck, and cause great darkness in the cabin. The lamp, however, still

burned, and there was a little light came down through the encumbered skylight.

“What are they up to?”

It required some little consideration to be able to decide, but presently a solution of this conduct on the part of the mutineers presented itself.

While those in the cabin could, from the dark after-part, command a view of the deck, it was impossible for a man to show himself without danger of being shot. This made it a matter of great difficulty to work the ship and carry on any necessary operations.

But now that a canvas screen was hung before the cuddy, those within could not see out, and consequently the mutineers could work in comparative safety.

They could hear them at work on the quarter-deck, and after a lapse of nearly a quarter of an hour Rodney and the only sailor, except Billy-go-easy and Black-Ball Bob, who were now on sentry, went forward to reconnoitre.

The seaman cut a small hole in the canvas, cautiously, and, as he thought, unperceived by the enemy.

But hardly had he placed his eye to it and looked forth, than the sharp crack of a revolver was heard, and he fell back shot in the body.

Black-ball Bob and Billy-go-easy came forward and dragged the wounded man aft. All now looked very serious; one of their number was dead, and two badly, perhaps mortally wounded, to say nothing of the captain, one of whose arms was nearly useless.

It was but too evident that the mutineers kept a very strict watch.

The captain, after examining the wounded man, shook his head, and expressed his conviction to the others that the hurt was mortal.

A half-hour passed in a state of terrible suspense. They could hear the enemy at work on the quarter-deck, but were in ignorance as to what they were doing.

The wounded man shortly recovered a little from the state of collapse into which those receiving gunshot wounds al-

ways fall at first, and was able to relate what he saw during the brief glimpse he got of the deck.

"They're making a kind of barricade all over the deck," he said faintly, "with spars, sails, and cases."

It became very necessary to know what was being done, so Rodney volunteered to go and get a look.

"Oh, Rodney, Rodney, don't go!" cried the supposed cabin-boy, clinging to him.

"Hush! for Heaven's sake, or you will betray yourself. Do you wish me to act the coward?"

Our hero started on his dangerous mission, determined to succeed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TRIUMPH OF THE MUTINEERS.

CRAWLING along the deck he came to the shattered door, and raising himself up, leaned out over the water-cask. Now, he judged that the moment he touched the sail the man on watch, who was no other than Yellow Dick himself, would fire at the place where the motion was seen, and if he were not careful he would probably share the fate of the sailor who was shot last, and who was fast sinking. So he took one of the long cuddy brooms, and holding it at arm's length, disturbed the curtain of sail opposite one of the windows, and and distant from himself some seven or eight feet.

As he thought, this manœuvre instantly drew fire, and crash went two barrels of Yellow Dick's revolver.

One of the bullets struck the head of the broom, knocking it out of his hand, so that he had good reason to congratulate himself on his prudence.

The instant he heard the two reports of the pistol he gave a loud cry.

Leah, the sham cabin-boy, ran forward, and echoed this cry as she fell on her knees by his side.

"Oh! Rodney, Rodney! dear Rodney, you are hurt!" she cried, in agonizing tones.

"No, no; don't interrupt me, Leah—I cried out to deceive them."

Then he quickly and skilfully cut a hole in the sail with the small sharp blade of his knife. Yellow Dick laughed with savage triumph as he heard the cry, which he thought denoted that another of the little band in the cabin was shot. For a moment or two he relaxed his attention, and Rodney was able to cut a hole in the sail without being observed.

He looked out through this little aperture, and could now see all that was being done on the quarter-deck.

Yellow Dick was seated on the after-hatch, pistol in hand, and keenly watching the sail, to detect the least motion. Rodney could have shot him if he had had his musket. On the whole, however, it was as well as it was, for he got a good view of the deck, and what they were doing. Having satisfied himself, he went quietly back to the after-part of the cabin, and reported what he had seen to the captain.

"They've made a strong barricade, captain, breast high, and have got out of the small cannon on each side pointed aft on the cabin."

This was alarming news, and Captain Scott did not seek to disguise it.

"They've got no shot, though they may have powder," he said, musingly.

"I heard Yellow Dick say, sir, that there was lots of bags of nails in the carpenter's berth."

"He was right. It is unfortunate. I must go and see for myself."

What he beheld when he went and cautiously peeped through the little hole Rodney had cut was not at all re-assuring.

Yellow Dick himself, with his left hand bound up with a piece of bloody rag, was in the act of loading the starboard cannon with a bag of nails which he was ramming home.

His accomplices stood about behind the barricade, their heads and shoulders only being visible.

"My lads," said Captain Scott, when he went back to his men, "we must be prepared for a fight. I think they mean to try and take us by a rush. We must throw up a counter barricade across the cabin, so that when they do make a rush we may have somewhere to retreat and make a last stand."

So boxes, beds, and every kind of portable article, as well as the furniture, were piled up across the cabin.

When this rude barricade was completed, Captain Scott ranged his little band behind it, and prepared to resist the attack which he momentarily expected. The two wounded men were left in the after-cabin, under the care of the women and the aged passengers.

Scarcely had these brief dispositions been made than there was a loud report, followed by the splintering of wood, which flew in all directions.

The women screamed, and the mutineers yelled. Rushing forward, some of them tore the sail on one side, and commenced clambering into the cabin over the water-cask. The door was now smashed all to pieces by the discharge of the cannon, and indeed half of the front of the cabin was blown away.

Nearly every one of the little band was wounded, either by some of the bags of nails or the numerous splinters which flew about. Blood was streaming down the face of Black-ball Bob from a bad cut on the forehead; Billy-go-easy was also wounded in the body, and Rodney was hurled to the deck, and much bruised by a large splinter. Fortunately none were so much hurt as to be incapable of fight, and to the yell of the rebels as they rushed on, there arose an answering shout of defiance.

The muskets were discharged in a volley, and then the captain and steward blazed away with their revolvers.

Several of the mutineers were hit, but still others poured in.

Black-ball Bob, furious from the smart of his wound, reloaded his musket, and, leaping over the barricade, dealt destruction all around.

They were evidently taken aback by this unexpected resistance, and gave way. Billy-go-easy and the skipper followed the example of Black Bob, and vaulting over the barrier, engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict. Rodney, who judged rightly that his strength would be of little avail in the mêlée, remained behind the barrier, firing a musket whenever he could do so without danger of hitting a friend instead of foe.

Leah, with admirable courage and self-possession, loaded for him, and handed to him another as fast as he fired one.

The fight raged furiously—oaths, yells, and threats, rang out. The screams of the women aft made up a terrible uproar, such as had never before been heard in the cabin of the *Windsor Castle*. Blood flowed freely in all directions, the painted panels being sprinkled, and the floor deluged with it.

“Out you go, you villains;” and with these words, Black Bob seized the body of a foe, whom he had knocked down, and threw him out over the cask and obstructions.

Rodney at this moment had a shot at Yellow Dick, who was endeavouring to urge his fellows to renew the attack. The shot failed to hit him, going under his arm, but it struck the man behind him, who instantly dropped the revolver he held, and, clambering back over the water-cask, disappeared.

Yellow Dick was armed with the carpenter’s axe, and Black-ball Bob espying him, rushed at him.

So impetuous was his onslaught that the ringleader speedily had his weapon dashed from his hands, and lay at the mercy of his powerful antagonist. Bob swung his musket round his head, and was about bringing it down to give the villain the *coup de grace*, when a pistol-bullet struck him in the fore-arm, causing him to drop his musket, and, for a moment, staggering him. The bone, however, was not broken, and in a second or two he collected himself and again dashed forward to the attack.

But meanwhile Yellow Dick had picked himself up from the ground, and made his escape — all his accomplices

having previously done so, except one, whose leg being broken, was unable to crawl over the barrier.

This man, Peter Schrader, the skipper collared and dragged over the cabin barricade. A parting volley from the muskets cleared the quarter-deck of the enemy, and the cabin remained in the possession of the victors in this brief but fierce fight.

For a moment Captain Scott thought of leading his men out in pursuit of the enemy and thus finally triumphing over them. But a look around and a moment's thought convinced him that this would be little better than madness on his part.

The mutineers, though baffled in their attempt to carry the cabin by storm, were not utterly defeated; they had received a warmer reception than they expected, and had met with a bloody repulse, but that was all.

Several of their number were wounded, and one was made prisoner.

Still, however, the remainder crouched together behind the barricade, and those who were not wounded quickly re-loaded their pistols.

Every one of those in the cabin had been wounded, more or less, with the exception of the two passengers, who bore a very ignominious part in the affray—merely firing a musket once each, and then retreating to the after-cabin.

Every one of the little band was exhausted from the violent exertion, and most were bleeding freely from the wounds inflicted by the jagged iron nails and splinters.

Keeping a sharp look-out against another rush on the part of the enemy, Captain Scott produced the medicine chest, and did his best for his wounded.

Black-ball Bob was bleeding profusely from the head, and besides had a bullet-wound on the fore-arm. A spoonful of Friar's Balsam, applied to his head, caused intense pain for a minute or two, but it stopped the bleeding, and that was the main point—for Captain Scott was well aware that their only hope of ultimate triumph against the mutineers, was by keeping up their spirits and strength.

The wound in the arm was not dangerous, the ball having glanced off the bone without lodging.

Billy-go-easy also was badly hurt; one of his ribs was broken, and he had besides a nasty wound on the head. Fortunately the bullet had not lodged in his body, and there seemed no immediate danger. Rodney Ray was severely bruised, and, like Billy and Bob, was also bleeding from a cut head. The steward was shot through the thigh and calf of the leg, and though very sore, was still able to shoulder a musket. The captain himself had received several flesh-wounds, but none of any importance.

So that the little band of defenders, though all hurt, had still plenty of fight left in them.

As for the mutineers, they, too, suffered badly.

Four of their number were dangerously wounded, and would be fit for nothing but very light work for some time. One was a prisoner, and four of the remaining six, including Yellow Dick himself, were wounded—not badly, but still enough to make them stiff, sore, and weak, from loss of blood.

So, as if by common consent, both sides suspended hostilities for a while.

Those in the cabin strengthened the barricade, loaded all the muskets, and made every possible preparation for a stubborn defence should the attack be renewed.

Captain Scott, who could not tell the amount of injury inflicted on the enemy, knew that many of them were wounded, and looked not unreasonably that some might be mortally hurt.

He knew that nothing would go so far to damp their spirits as the death of any of their number.

Unfortunately, however, the bullets had been merciful to them, and there was only one man so badly hurt to be past recovery. This one was the German, Carl Schrader, the brother of the man who was made prisoner. He was shot through the lungs, and died in the course of an hour.

It now became apparent that the mutineers were not disposed to renew the attack.

They built up their breastwork higher, and though two

or three of them were always to be seen on the watch to guard against surprise, no attempt was made to fire into the cabin.

Probably they were glad of a cessation of hostilities in face of the last repulse they had met with.

Behind the barricade across the deck the wounded were stretched on sails, with their arms beside them, ready to take a part in the fight if the captain's party should sally out.

Yellow Dick, himself wounded, addressed them briefly, and told them that their only chance was to hold out until the defenders of the cabin should be forced to yield from fatigue and exhaustion. He pointed out to them that they had gone too far to recede now. Blood had been shed, and at least one man had been killed on each side. If they surrendered now nothing could save every one of them from the gallows.

This was sufficiently plain to the most stupid among them, and they sullenly announced their readiness to fight to the last.

The wounded men, however, bitterly reproached Yellow Dick with having led them into an undertaking perhaps beyond their powers.

The leader defended himself.

"How was I to know or expect that they would break through the hold and into the cabin so sharp? I can't make it out. It seems to me there must have been some treachery at work. Anyhow, we're in for it now, and must fight through. It'll all come right, no doubt; we're more than two to one, and some of them must be desperate bad. They must keep a watch night and day, and that'll tire 'em out in time."

"Ay," said Bill Bloxam, "and so must we keep a watch, and a sharp one, too, besides a man at the helm, and work the ship also."

"One of the wounded can take the helm—there's two of 'em only hit in the legs, and they can sit on a hen-coop, and steer."

Still, though there was a stubborn determination to fight

it out to the last, it was evident that the mutineers were not pleased with the state of affairs. They had suffered severely; one of their number was dead, and others badly, even dangerously wounded, while before them lowered ominously the gallows and the hangman.

This latter unpleasant thought, which would intrude though in one respect it urged them to desperation, in another way produced a dispiriting effect. The defenders of the cabin had only to hold their own, while the wretched mutineers—their hands deeply imbued in blood—must first overcome their present opponents, and then face other difficulties and dangers. They would have, as it were, to run the gauntlet of all mankind. Should what they had done be discovered, a long rope and a short shrift would be all they could hope for. Altogether, the prospects of the mutineers looked very gloomy. It is possible that had it not been for the one fatal fact that life had been taken—murder deliberately committed—they would have surrendered. But such a solution to the tragedy was not to come to pass.

These circumstances caused a sort of armed neutrality between the occupants of the cabin and the mutineers. The mate and the seaman who had met their death were buried, while the captain did his best for the wounds of the others. On the part of the mutineers, too, there had even one death, while two more were quite unfit for work, and several others in constant pain from their unhealed wounds.

Meanwhile the vessel was kept in a southerly course, and, as the wind was uniformly fair, made great progress.

It was well understood in the cabin that the rebellious men were going to make for Australia. But as to the way in which those in the cabin would be disposed of, no one knew, or could guess.

At last, however, after a weary three weeks of constant vigilance, Yellow Dick came to the barricade, and demanded a parley.

“Well, what is it?” asked Captain Scott.

“There’s land on the lee beam. We’re willing to give

you the long-boat and one of the quarter-boats, with water and provisions, and you can leave the ship unharmed."

"And suppose we decline to accept your offer?"

"Then we shall take all the boats ourselves, and row away, first having scuttled the ship and set her on fire."

The captain held a consultation with the rest, and finally it was agreed to accept this offer. Already, in addition to the wounds, fever had begun to make its appearance; and Captain Scott justly feared that it would be impossible to contend with success against the rebels, now that a fresh and terrible ally had made its appearance.

It was eight o'clock at night when the two boats were hoisted out and suffered to drop under the stern. Having placed in each a small quantity of provisions and water, the ship was evacuated, a good look-out being kept against treachery.

The captain, Black-ball Bob, and all the women passengers, went in the larger boat, as also the wounded sailors. In the smaller, or starboard quarter-boat, were Billy-go-easy (in charge), the steward, the male passengers, and our hero.

So soon as the last man was on board, the painter was cut, and now the *Windsor Castle* was in full possession of the rebels. When asked as to the second mate, the carpenter, and the two seamen, Yellow Dick said they would not be suffered to go along. So with a heavy heart the little party in the two boats found themselves alone on the ocean, and saw the *Windsrr Castle* sail slowly away. Bitter were the feelings of Captain Scott, as he thus finally lost his ship. But repining was useless, so all haste was made to reach the land, which just before dark could be discovered to the southward.

They hoped to reach it by daylight in the morning, and the captain believed it to be a part of Van Dieman's Land.

Fresh misfortunes occurred in the night, however. A thick fog came on, and the two boats missed each other; the smaller one drifting away to the leeward. The only compass was in the long boat; thus our hero and Billy-

go-easy found themselves adrift on the ocean in an open boat.

Morning revealed yet further disaster to those weary waifs. The land was no longer in sight. They had drifted away from it, or been carried away by some current.

Nor could anything be seen of the long boat ; and thus they found themselves, without chart or compass, and with but two days' provisions and water, veritably cast away on the broad expanse of ocean.

For three days they tossed helplessly to and fro : and then, just as despair was settling down on their hearts, a sail appeared, and it soon became apparent that it was approaching them.

They succeeded in attracting her attention, and almost exhausted, perishing from cold, were taken on board.

She proved to be the American barque *Baltimore*, and was bound to Wellington, in New Zealand.

Not until he had been some minutes on deck did Rodney's thoughts revert to one who, for his sake, had perilled much. A horrible misgiving flashed across his mind. Where was Leah ?

" Bill," he said to the old sailor, in a hoarse whisper, " what about the cabin-boy ? Is he in the long-boat ? "

" No," Billy answered gravely ; " just before we took to the boats he went down into the store-room to get something up. In the hurry and confusion we forgot him, and he's left aboard."

" Oh, Heavens ! " cried Rodney ; " and she's in the power of those fiends ! "

" She—she—who's she ? "

" Did I say she ? " answered Rodney, smiling faintly ; " I did not know it."

Alas ! poor Leah ! this was indeed a sad fate, after all your constancy and devotion. Bitterly Rodney reproached himself with his carelessness ; but alas ! regrets could not mend matters, and he was obliged to console himself by hoping for the best—that her sex might not be discovered.

* * * * *

A week later and they sailed into Wellington Harbour. On board the barque they had received every kindness and attention ; and they landed in the New Zealand port safe and sound, so far as health and strength were concerned.

Two days afterwards Billy-go-easy and Rodney shipped on board the brig *Flying Fish*—the former as A.B., the latter as ordinary seaman.

She was bound on a trading voyage to the South Sea Islands, to obtain *biche-de-mer* and sandal-wood. The *biche-de-mer*, the principal object of the cruise, was for the China market. Should they be fortunate, the voyage would be a most lucrative one to all concerned.

They shipped to take a certain share of the profits in lieu of wages, as is done in whalers.

But before proceeding farther a brief description of the *biche-de-mer*, and other products of the islands, with a glimpse at the manners and customs, will not be out of place. It is not every one who knows what *biche-de-mer* is.

Biche-de-mer is, then, a sort of sea-snail, esteemed by the Chinese a great luxury. This snail belongs to the genus, *Holothuria*, and the prepared article finds a ready sale at all times in China, where it is used as an ingredient in rich soups. Of the *biche-de-mer* there are several kinds, some of which are much superior in quality to the others. They are distinguishable both by shape and colour ; but more particularly by the latter. One of the inferior kinds is slender and of a dark brown colour ; soft to the touch, and stains the hands red. Another is of a gray colour, speckled. A third is large and yellow, with a rough skin and tubercles, or little prominences, on its sides.

The most esteemed kinds are found on the coral reefs with which these seas abound, in water from one to two fathoms deep, where they are caught by diving. The inferior sorts are found on reefs which are nearly dry at low water.

A thorough knowledge of the native character is essential to the mariner, as it requires all possible vigilance on the

part of the captain to prevent surprise and treachery on behalf of the savages.

So dangerous is the trade considered, that no insurance can be effected on vessels bound to the Fee-jee group. In order to lessen the danger as much as possible, no large canoes are allowed alongside, and a chief of high rank is usually demanded and kept on board as a hostage. Where these precautions have been neglected, disastrous consequences have often ensued, and in more than one case a whole ship's crew has been massacred, and the vessel plundered and burnt.

Biche-de-mer is taken to Canton or to Manilla, where it commands a ready sale.

These islands, as before said, are blessed with a splendid climate, and soil so fertile as to preclude almost entirely the necessity for labour.

The cruise of the *Flying Fish* was a most successful one. In the course of four months sufficient of *biche-de-mer* was collected, dried, and packed for the China market, to prove very remunerative to owners, captain, and crew. Rodney Ray, though so young a sailor, was fully competent for an ordinary scaman's duty, and he became a general favourite.

No better school for seamanship could have been selected. The *Flying Fish* was a new vessel, and there was abundant work in the rigging, in setting up, seizing, and fitting gear, &c.

We will not here follow the career of Rodney, nor watch his progress from boy to man. Suffice it to say, that for three years our hero cruised about the world, and rose from ordinary to able seaman, and before he was nineteen had twice served as second officer. On one occasion a startling adventure befell him.

Here, however, we will conclude the first part of this our story, and in our next chapter will proceed to relate the further adventures which befell our hero—the perils he went through, and the hardships he underwent.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

THE four years fixed on by Rodney and Geordie Vane have elapsed.

Scarcely daring to hope that this boyish tryst would be kept, our hero strolled up to Pitt Street, and entered the theatre.

That night a new foreign actress made her *début* on the Sydney boards. Her fame had preceded her, and the house was crammed by an enthusiastic audience.

For days before all Sydney had been talking of Signorita —, — her beauty, her talent, her grace, and the enthusiastic reception she had met with everywhere, both in the new and old world.

The curtain fell on the first piece, and as Rodney strolled out he met a young man in the lobby whose face seemed familiar. At first he did not recognize in the tall, strapping young fellow who stood before him, his old schoolfellow Geordie Vane. The latter, however, recognized him instantly—probably our hero was not so much changed.

“Rodney!”

Though he did not at first recognize the face and form of his old schoolfellow, the voice—the old familiar voice—came like angels’ music, and sweeping away as it were the gap created by the lapse of years, in fancy he once again stood in the playground of the school with his old friend Geordie Vane.

“Geordie,” he cried, grasping his hand; “this is indeed a surprise—a pleasant one.”

“A surprise, Rodney?” replied Vane, and there was a tinge of reproach in his tone. “Did I not promise I would be here? Did I not agree to meet you on this very night?”

“Yes, yes; pardon me, Geordie. I thought you would be nere. I know you always keep your word.”

"What of the prizes?" Rodney asked suddenly, as they walked together down the street.

"I kept my word, and gained them all," was the quiet reply.

"Did you go to College?"

"No; I went to sea, and, like yourself, have been cruising about the world for three years."

"And your adventures? You know we promised each to spin a yarn when we met."

"Ah! Rodney, you will beat me at that; not that I have experienced nothing worth relating, but am so clumsy in the narration. You must tell me your adventure first."

"Willingly. I have a rattler, Geordie, and one which is quite fresh in my mind, for it occurred not four months ago."

"The place?"

"Havannah."

"Here we are at the hotel where I am stopping. Come in, and we will have this yarn of you—then return to the theatre, and I will tell mine after supper."

They went up to the smoking-room of the hotel, ordered rum-punch and cigars, and then Rodney related his Havannah adventure.

The reader shall judge whether it was as he stated—a rattler.

We give it in his own words—

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RODNEY RAY'S ADVENTURE IN HAVANNAH—A FIGHT IN THE DARK.

I NEED not specify the circumstances which caused me to find myself in Boston city one fine morning, without money, and with no means of getting any, except by shipping.

So ship I did, on board a clipper brig called the *Turtle*

Dove, as second mate. She carried a crew of fourteen seamen, whilst the captain, first and second mates, boatswain, carpenter, cook, and steward, made up twenty-one in all.

She was bound, I was informed, to "Havannah, for orders."

At the time I did not stop to consider what a strange and unusual voyage this was on which we were about to start. I soon found out, however, that this was a very strange vessel; and before we sailed out of Boston harbour, I was perfectly well aware that a mystery enveloped her.

By degrees the true nature of our voyage oozed out. To my astonishment I found I was supposed to know all about it. It appeared, indeed, that the mission of the *Turtle Dove* was a matter of notoriety about the sea-faring portion of the town.

But when our voyage had commenced, I found that I had made a great mistake. The brig was owned by some sanctimonious Boston merchants, and was going out for what purpose do you imagine? No other than to obtain a cargo of slaves and run them over to the Island of Cuba. There was an agent of the owners in Havannah, and we were going there for final arrangements, and to ship stores and water.

I had no proof of all this, but discovered it gradually, bit by bit, in the course of conversation, and by hearing the skipper and mate talk.

I found in a day or two that this Yankee brig with the amiable name was a "floating hell."

The skipper never got drunk in harbour or ashore, on which he greatly prided himself; but made up for this deprivation by being drunk the whole time without exception when at sea.

He was nicknamed Black Jack, and was an uproarious bully, as also was the mate. So intolerable was the life on board, that I firmly made up my mind to leave when we arrived in Havannah. The fact of my being certain she was going on a slaving expedition was quite a sufficient justification without anything else.

The skipper had not attempted to strike me, though he had the mate, who, however, knowing his peculiarities, chose

to put up with it. I may here say that the voyage, if successful, would be an extremely lucrative one. Each foremast hand was to receive negroes to the value of nearly a hundred and fifty pounds sterling, and besides would have a chance of making more in other ways.

The captain knocked some of the men about in a most shameful manner, and, when I expostulated, threatened to serve me the same. Now I was determined not to come to open war at sea, but to leave it till we arrived at Havannah, and then state my intention of going ashore.

We arrived in Havannah, and I stated my intention, upon which, the skipper produced a revolver and threatened to blow my brains out. He was mad drunk, and the vessel was piloted in by the mate.

Next day I demanded permission to go ashore to see the consul. This was abruptly refused. The skipper called me a mutinous scoundrel, and said he would disrate me and send me before the mast; whereupon I told him I would go before the mast, and did not intend to serve as second mate. He said, "A good thing too; I was not fit for the post." Accordingly I took my chest forward in the forecabin—not, be it understood, with the intention of serving as a seaman, or indeed at all, but to see how the land lay there, and whether I could get any, and if so, how many, to join me in taking a boat by force, and leaving this infernal brig.

I found seven willing to act with me. The other seven were not to be trusted. Most of them were incorrigible ruffians; liked the nature of the voyage—"blackbirding," as they called it—and looked forward to the rich booty on their return in two or three months' time.

In the forecabin, then, we were eight against seven—that is, including myself. But there were the captain, the mate, the boatswain, the steward, and cook—all powerful, determined men, on the other side, in addition to the rest of the crew. This brought the odds heavily against us.

Nevertheless, I laid my plans, and proceeded to unfold them to those who were going into the affair with me.

I proposed to watch an opportunity, and secure the captain and as many as we could when all were in the cabin together. I hoped thus to cage mate, steward, cook, and Black Jack himself. This I intended to effect by putting the companion-hatch on and blocking it up by water-casks, &c. Thus taking them unawares, I judged we could easily overpower the rest. I would ensure that the long-boat should be towing alongside ; and we could toss our things in and quietly run her ashore.

"But," objected some one, "it will be mutiny, won't it?"

"Of course it will ; but who cares if it were high treason ? Not I, for one."

This plan was agreed on, and that very evening fixed for carrying it out. No sign was given, but all remained orderly and quiet. Doubtless the captain thought that his fury and his oaths had frightened us into submission. He was slightly mistaken. Evening came. The sun went down, and the anchor watches were set at eight bells. At nine o'clock (two bells) the attempt was to be made.

I had arranged everything, and stationed my men in readiness. The captain, the mate, and the steward, were in the cabin, seated at the table, taking their evening grog ; the cook was in the pantry. I was usually with them at this time, before I had voluntarily gone forward. The boatswain and carpenter lived in a small cabin by themselves down the lower fore-castle ; while the crew lived in a deck-house—what the Yankees call a hurricane-house—between the masts.

They were in their berth, and also, fortunately for us, as it seemed, the boatswain had invited three of the crew down, and was treating them with grog.

This, with the party in the cabin, would make up nine. If we could secure them we should have but little trouble with the rest.

Two bells struck.

Instantly I and two others clapped on the companion-hatches, and quickly rolled a water-cask on top, and there lashed it.

Then we piled hen-coops, cordage, spars, everything at hand, on the skylight, so that it could not be forced off. At the same time the very same thing was done forward—and the boatswain, carpenter, and the three men, were caged. Two of the remaining men were in their berths, and were secured without trouble ; and then the rest made no resistance, and the ship was ours.

The long-boat was alongside, and we hastened into the hurricane-house, where the crew lived, that the men might get their things, and throw them into the boat. I had previously removed everything I had of value in the cabin—which was not much, by the way—and brought it forward. We were on the point of leaving the house, and repairing to the boat, when we heard the voice of the captain shouting.

Those we had confined in the cabin had broken out, and, led by the captain and mate, were about to attack us. It appears that the mate had climbed out of the after-cabin window, gained the deck, and removed the obstacles, while we were busy in the hurricane-house, thinking all secure.

Then he had done the same to the fore-castle-hatch, and thus freed the boatswain, carpenter, and the three men. The next moment the mate and captain dashed into the hurricane-house.

The mate came first, with a lantern (for it was dark as pitch) in one hand, and a belaying-pin in the other. After him came the captain, with a revolver ; then the boatswain and carpenter.

As we had begun the affair, we were determined to see it out and fight. We were all armed with knives or pistols, which was fortunate for us, but disastrous to the other party. The mate dashed in first, as I have said.

“Seize them !” he cried, “and handcuff them, the scoundrels !”

The words were barely out of his mouth when the lantern was dashed from his hands and extinguished, and he himself felled to the ground by a heavy blow from a man who stood behind the door, watching for the first who should enter. Down went the mate with a howl of mingled rage

and pain, his revolver firing off as he fell. He continued to fire, however, as he lay on the ground, till all the barrels were empty.

The captain was the next who entered, and he also was struck down by the same man. Now, however, the boat-swain, carpenter, and others, rushed in, and a fearful hand-to-hand conflict with knives, pistols, and revolvers, ensued.

When all were inside someone closed the door—which slid in a groove, and did not work on hinges.

Then we were in utter darkness, fighting desperately. I tell you, my boy, it was a "high old time." Oaths, cries, the occasional crash of a revolver, the trampling of feet, and the noise made by the combatants as they struggled and fell about in the darkness, were heard on all sides.

I received a heavy blow on the head from someone, and fell to the ground on my face. I hastened to get up again, and noticed, as I did so, that the deck was quite wet—with blood, of course.

And then a piercing shriek rang forth. Some unfortunate wretch had received a stab from a sheath-knife, and that was his cry of agony—perhaps his death-cry. It was quite close to me, and although I could not see in the darkness, I could hear every motion. I could make out that the wounded man was seeking to defend himself—retreating in order to avoid another blow from his enemy. I heard the latter rush forward with a furious oath, stumbling over a chest, as he did so. Then I knew that the two men closed again. I heard them struggling together for a few seconds—and then could distinguish plainly a dull, heavy blow.

Another dreadful shriek!

"Mercy, mercy!" cried the wounded man. "Ah! oh, Lord!"

Again another stab, and he fell heavily to the ground, where he lay groaning. Meanwhile the fight raged with great fury all around. The struggling forms of the combatants were tumbling and falling all over the place as they contended together. No more fatal shots were heard, as

the pistol-barrels were all empty ; but the fight was waged with knives and belaying-pins.

Suddenly I felt myself attacked by an enemy whom I could feel, hear, but not see. I had no knife, and all the barrels of my pistol had been fired.

I defended myself as well as I could, but stumbling over one of the seamen's chests in the utter darkness, I felt my assailant, who had in his hand a heavy weapon, raining blows on me as I endeavoured to rise.

In my efforts I laid my hand on the chest which had caused me to fall. I felt something hard and cold.

With a cry of joy I seized it, and attacked my adversary in turn.

It was an axe ; and aiming a blow at haphazard, I cut my enemy down.

At this moment the door was opened, either by accident or design, and the moonlight streamed in. Almost instantly, however, the door was again closed, and all was pitchy darkness as before.

During that moment, however, I had been enabled to take a rapid survey of the state of affairs. I saw five or six forms lying on the deck, either dead or badly wounded. I saw also the figures of four or five men huddled up in one corner of the place. These were our antagonists, and I perceived, during the few moments that the door was opened, that several of them were loading their revolvers again. No sooner was the door closed than I dashed forward, axe in hand, to attack this group. It was now a struggle of life and death. I felt that we must win or die.

The shout I gave as I rushed forward was answered, and though I could not see, I knew that others were working in concert with me.

As I went forward, swinging the axe around my head, there was a flash and a sharp report. I staggered back, for I had been shot in the shoulder.

Only for a moment, however ; then I again rushed to the attack. Down went my enemies like skittle-pins before my terrible weapon. I could not see the effect of

my blows, but knew that I must have done a good deal of damage.

Several pistol-shots followed the one by which I had been wounded, but none took effect—at least on me. For a few minutes more a struggle was kept up ; not so fiercely as before, however ; and then the uproar almost ceased, and the men began to call each other by name.

I distinguished that it was mostly our party which did so, and gathered from the fact that the others had been worsted. Indeed, our antagonists gave no sign of their presence otherwise than by groans.

All were placed *hors de combat*. That last attack of mine with the axe, seconded by the others, had done terrible execution and finished the affair.

“Open the door,” some one cried.

It was done ; and again the moon streamed in on the scene.

I gave a hasty glance round, then hurried on deck, glad to get away.

In that one quick glance I saw quite sufficient to cause a shudder. The deck of the small place was covered with the prostrate forms of the wounded. One or two lay over chests as they had fallen in the fight.

I saw all this, and hurried away shouting to the long-boat.

She was lying alongside as we had left her a couple of hours before. In the course of a couple of minutes we were all in her. All, I said ; not all, however, for there were but five of us now. We waited a little, and shouted to the others. No answer.

“Dead, I reckon, or badly hurt,” said one, coolly.

“It’s no use waiting—we must look out for ourselves now, for there’ll be a thundering shine about this affair.”

So saying, the speaker cast off the painter, and two of our party, the only two unwounded, seated themselves at the oars, and rowed rapidly away from the vessel.

We did not intend to land at the town of Havannah—for we judged, and not without reason, that should we do so our arrest would be prompt and certain,

Four out of the five were badly wounded, while the remaining one was splashed with blood.

We accordingly rowed for a small creek about three miles above the town, where we ran the boat on shore.

After resting for a time, we all got into the sea—up to our waists—and proceeded to wash the blood off our faces, hands, and clothes.

This done, we again got into the boat, and rolling ourselves up in the sail, sought a few hours' sleep.

At daybreak we again rose, and held a council as to what was to be done.

We walked along the shore to the jutting headland which formed one extremity of the creek, and looked out towards the shipping in the bay, and the brig in particular.

We saw what caused us no little alarm. The brig was surrounded by a great crowd of boats, which continually rowed backwards and forwards, as if in a commotion. We noticed that her decks were crowded, and could distinguish Spanish soldiers on board. We could also distinguish by the flags several government police boats.

Some of these were rowing about from ship to ship. Doubtless they were searching for us.

Next we noticed that some of the boats rowed towards the shore, and then commenced slowly skirting the land. They were evidently searching to find the place where we had landed.

No time was to be lost. In the course of their search they would soon come upon the creek, and if they found the boat they would know we had landed there.

By my orders the boat was laden with stones and rowed into deep water.

Then the plug was pulled out, and she was allowed to sink—those who rowed her out swimming on shore.

Thus, we had destroyed all trace of our landing, and might hope to escape capture. Though justified in my own mind in what I had done, I by no means felt sure that the Spanish authorities would look at it in the same light. Therefore it was not at all advisable to be captured.

Leaving the banks of the creek, we proceeded half a mile inland, and hid ourselves in the brushwood—in such a position as to command a view of the bay.

All day long boats were rowing to and fro, and several even entered and explored the creek where we had landed—thus proving the wisdom of the step we had taken in sinking the boat.

We remained concealed in the brushwood, not daring to venture out. As evening approached, however, we determined to leave our hiding place. We arranged to separate, each going his own way and trusting to chance, as it would be madness for us all to go together in a body.

Four out of the five determined to make their way overland to the seaport of Matanzas, distant about thirty miles.

I resolved to make my way to the town of Havannah—trusting to my good fortune to clear me of this, as it had of many other scrapes. Accordingly, as the sun went down, we left the brushwood. We exchanged a shake of the hand all round, and bade each other “good bye”—probably for ever.

I was suffering great pain from my wounded shoulder ; for the bullet was still buried in the flesh, and inflammation had already set in.

Painfully, wearily, I made my way towards the town, halting at every place where I could find water, in order to bathe my shoulder, the pain from which was so intense as to make me turn at times quite faint.

I had arrived at the outskirts of the town, when I found myself quite weak from loss of blood. I knew that if I did not take some rest and refreshment I should not be able to proceed.

I had not intended to enter any house along the road, considering it unsafe ; but my sufferings were so acute that I could not resist. I entered a wine-shop by the roadside, and seating myself on a small cushioned chair near the door, called for a bottle of wine.

Scarcely was I seated and the wine brought, than a party of Spanish sailors entered

My attention was riveted by the very first words they uttered. They were part of the boat's crew of a Spanish man-of-war, and had been engaged all day in searching for us.

I gathered from their conversation (for I understood Spanish) that a reward was offered for our apprehension, and that the severest punishment was in store for us. Orders had been conveyed to all the seaports in the island, to prevent our embarking, and the Spaniards again and again expressed their belief that we had all made for Matanzas.

I also gathered from their conversation that several parties had been dispatched overland, in order to catch the mutineers, and that it was considered certain the object would be effected before the next night.

Watching my opportunity, I beckoned the attendant, settled for what I had had, and stole quietly out.

"So, so," I thought, "it is fortunate I determined to make for Havannah, instead of Matanzas. I fear the others are doomed to capture, from what I hear."

I was now at the outskirts of the town of Havannah, and the question became, What should I do? Where should I go?

I had money, but I dared not go to an hotel. I thought for some time without being able to come to a satisfactory conclusion, and then determined to push on, and trust to my good fortune.

The outskirts of the town of Havannah are composed of handsome residences, surrounded by orange groves and gardens. It was not quite dark, and as the high road was somewhat thronged by people, who gazed strangely and suspiciously at my singular and blood-stained appearance, I left it, and made my way as best I could across some of these gardens; my wounded shoulder was now dreadfully painful. The wine had for a time given me strength; but I now felt its effects in increased pain. My shoulder throbbed, and the bleeding, which had stopped, recommenced. I grew quite faint from pain, and leaned against a tree for support. I grew dizzy, and the whole landscape swam before my eyes.

I felt myself rapidly failing, and knew that I was about to faint, perhaps never again to recover my consciousness.

"Good heavens!" I thought; "and is it thus I am to perish—alone—uncared for?"

I saw a light shining from a house window, about a hundred yards further on. It was the house to which the garden I was in belonged.

Collecting all my energy, I made an effort, and staggered forward in the direction of the house.

As I approached I could discover the form of a woman on the balcony. My eyes were dim, and I could not tell with certainty whether she was young or old.

"Surely," I thought, "she will take pity on me, be she who she may."

And with this thought I struggled on, each moment getting nearer to the house, and each moment also becoming weaker and fainter.

Arrived within a few yards of my goal, my strength utterly deserted me. I fell against a tree, in passing striking my wounded shoulder. A cry of pain escaped me, and then everything faded from my sight, and all was darkness. I had fallen fainting to the ground.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CORA.

WHEN I returned to my senses I found myself stretched on a couch.

A woman, an old negress, was bending over me, bathing my head and wounded shoulder, while another female was flitting noiselessly about the room.

"Is he better, nurse?" asked the latter; "is he recovering?"

"Yes, miss, he's coming round now fast enough."

"What a dreadful bullet-wound ! and see, too, how his head is cut about ! " .

This was true enough. I had received several blows on the head, of which, however, I had thought nothing in comparison with the pistol-shot.

The other female stooped by the side of the couch and laid her cool hand on my forehead.

I had closed my eyes, and as I felt the soft pressure of her hand on my forehead, I said in Spanish—

"Thanks, lady—a thousand thanks."

"Ah !" exclaimed the lady, "he speaks Spanish—he understands us. After all, he is a Spaniard, although I thought him an American, or an Englishman."

"Yes, yes, lady," I muttered, "I am an Englishman."

"But you speak Spanish ?"

"A little."

"How were you wounded, and how came you in my garden ?"

"How was I wounded ?—I will tell you by-and-by. Now I feel faint."

The truth of the matter was, I was at a loss to explain the affair, for I did not know how my hostess would receive the truth if I were to tell her.

"Yes, yes, poor fellow," she said, gazing compassionately at me. "You are faint and ill, of course. Rest yourself ; the surgeon will be here presently, to attend to your wound."

The old negress poured me out a drink into a glass, which I eagerly drained off.

It was an acid drink, containing a cordial, which produced an immediate and wonderful effect. Looking around the room in which I was, I discovered it was on the first floor, and opened on to a balcony, probably the one where I had first seen the female figure before I fainted.

I now proceeded to survey this lady, who had, like a good Samaritan, succoured me and saved me from death.

The room was well lighted, and I saw at once that she was young and handsome. The more I gazed the more I became impressed by her great beauty.

An exceeding graceful, supple figure, surmounted by a head and neck of exquisite proportions. A profusion of beautiful black hair, two large, flashing black eyes, beautiful teeth, and faultless features. Such was the *tout ensemble* of my fair protectress.

I had not the pleasure of gazing long on this sweet vision, for she shortly afterwards went away, leaving me in charge of the old negress. I know not whether the draught contained an opiate or not, but I shortly afterwards fell fast asleep.

When I awoke, I found to my great surprise that my wound had been dressed and strapped up.

It was broad daylight, and the sun was high in the heavens, so I knew I must have slept all night. I was quite alone, not a soul being in the room, nor could I hear any one moving about.

I strove to rise, but was too weak, and the effort caused me so much pain that I was glad to fall back again. Looking around me, I saw by the side of the couch was placed a table, with wine and fruit on it, also a small silver hand-bell.

It was evident I was well cared for.

I took the bell and rang it gently. Scarcely had I done so when I heard a light step, and the same beautiful girl entered.

"Ah!" she said, with a smile, "you are awake then, dear Englishman."

"Awake, senorita," I replied, "yes—and surely it must be about time—for it seems to me it must be quite noon."

"No matter; the sleep has done you good."

"A thousand thanks, lady, for your kindness to me. I assure you I shall always be grateful, and ready at all times to prove my gratitude. May I have the honour of knowing whom I address," I continued; "who is this beautiful lady who has taken compassion on me?"

"Oh, certainly," she said, smiling; "they call me Cora Nina. I am only a poor dancer and actress at the theatre."

"Cora Nina! What a sweet name!—and a dancer, too; is it possible!"

"You speak as if you are surprised, or disappointed. Do you, then, despise me because I am a dancer?"

"Despise you, beautiful Cora! Heaven forbid!—I admire and adore you."

The girl blushed, and was, I thought, not altogether displeased.

"Ah! senor," she said, "you must not talk so—it is not right; besides, it is not good for your wound."

"Not talk?—how can I help it, in the presence of such a divinity?"

"Silence, senor," she said, playfully, and putting her hand on my lips.

I seized it, and kissed it.

She let me retain it a second or two, and then snatched it away, saying, laughingly—

"On my word, Senor Englishman, you are a pretty invalid. If you go on thus when you are wounded and ill, you must be positively terrible when well!"

"Ah! do not say so. Do not let me think I would ever be terrible to you—"

"There, that will do—your face is getting quite flushed; you will be in a fever again directly. I expect the surgeon shortly, to see your wound, so do not excite yourself by talking."

So saying, she left the room, giving me a parting smile as she vanished. Yet, although she had gone, her fair form was still before my eyes. It seemed I could never tire of thinking of her and recalling to my memory each individual grace and beauty. I was infatuated. I felt it—knew it—and did not struggle against the feeling. Even as I again dropped off to sleep, the words "Cora Nina" lingered on my lips and in my dreams her lovely shape fitted about my couch.

When next I awoke she was standing by my bedside, in company with a man. This was the surgeon, who forthwith proceeded to put me to great torture by dressing my wound.

Cora remained in the room the whole time, and at each

exclamation of pain wrung from me by the somewhat rough handling of the doctor, a sympathetic cry would break from her fair lips.

"Here, doctor, do pray be gentle with the poor boy. See how pale he is—see how he suffers."

The business of probing and dressing the wound completed, the surgeon took his departure, and I was again alone with Cora Nina. Seating herself by my side, she, with her own fair hands, bathed my forehead, as she saw that I was faint from pain and weakness.

I said little, but tried to express my gratitude and devotion by my looks. Nor was the fair Cora indifferent ; at least, I fancied she was not.

What need to go on, and step by step repeat an oft-told tale ? I grew better under the care of Cora. How could I repay her kindness—her devotion, otherwise than by an equal devotion ?

Long before I was able to leave my couch I declared to Cora that I loved her deeply, passionately ; that I never had—nor would love another. The words might have been true or false, that is no matter. At the time, I believed what I said. I watched the mantling blushes rise to her fair cheek, and saw her trembling with joy at my avowal. I drew her towards me, and she wept on my shoulder—not tears of grief.

"Cora, dear Cora, say you love me !"

"Love you !—love you ! Heaven knows that I do, indeed, love you."

* * * * *

I quickly recovered my health and strength, and in a fortnight was able to leave the house for a stroll in the gardens.

It now became a question with me as to what I should do. Cora's affection for me seemed to increase each day in force. My will with her was law ; my slightest wish attended to as though I were her master and she a slave.

What was I to do ? What could I do ? Cora was young, beautiful, and fascinating ; she loved me, and I loved her.

What wonder, then, that I lingered on, long after **my convalescence**, and basked in the smiles of the beautiful actress.

I made up my mind that I would marry her, and told her of my determination. Never shall I forget the transport of joy with which she welcomed my offer.

And so it was settled ; we were to be married in the course of a month or two.

Now, be it observed that even after I was sufficiently well to get about, I never went into the town, but confined myself to the garden and immediate neighbourhood of her villa.

I explained to her my circumstances frankly—that I was not of age, but I should, on my majority, inherit a sum of five thousand pounds by my mother's settlement. With that and what she had saved, and what profit came, and what windfalls might come to me we could live comfortably.

I was quite serious—all that time I fully intended to marry this beautiful girl and settle down.

Slowly, however, there arose clouds on the horizon of our summer sky. Cora had saved money ; a very considerable sum, I can tell you ; but still insisted on following her profession. I proposed that I should go to sea for a year or so—until I was of age, and then return to claim my bride—meanwhile I wished her to give up the theatrical profession, and live quietly at home. At first she said that she could not allow me to leave her. When I explained to her, however, that I strongly objected to my future wife appearing in public for money, she was at first astonished and then angry.

She absolutely refused.

No, she would not leave the stage. I had known her first as Cora Nina the dancer and actress, and as such had not thought her beneath my notice—why should I now affect to despise her profession ? In vain I insisted and threatened by turns. In reply, she asked whether I had ever observed anything unbecoming in her conduct—whether I doubted her truth—her love for me—her honour and virtue ? If I would say so she would never appear again or think of me either.

I could not have said so. She was, I really believe, the rock of purity—her virtue was befitting Cæsar's wife—above

suspicion. I told her frankly, that in that respect she was faultless.

"Then why should you ask me to relinquish a profession I love, while you, to feed your pride, go roaming about? No, no, I will not do it. I love the stage, I love admiration, applause—I am ambitious."

"Why do I wish you to do so?" I replied. "Because Cora, I hope that, though you love admiration, and are ambitious, you love me more."

"You doubt that I love you?" she exclaimed, passionately.

"I fear it is useless my arguing with you, Cora. Once again, I wish you to renounce the theatrical profession for love of me."

"No," she replied, decisively. "I must not—cannot—will not."

"Then you prefer to renounce me?"

Her eyes filled with tears, and, throwing her arms around my neck, she wept.

The victory was almost won. I thought it was quite so. But when I was not present, her old love for her profession returned, and I now found that to dissuade her would be one continual struggle. I know not how it would have ended, but at this period an event occurred which quite changed the course of affairs.

CHAPTER XXX.

MAKING AN EXCHANGE

I HAD now been on the island some three months, and was quite recovered from my wounds. I never ventured far away from the villa, or frequented any public thoroughfare. I heard casually that the pirates (so we were called) of the *Turtle Dove* had all been captured, save one, and now lay in Castle Muro, waiting to be tried. I knew something of Spanish justice and Spanish laws, and therefore held the

thought of being arrested in great dread. But when these dark clouds arose on the fair sky of our love, I grew reckless, and once or twice followed Nina into the verandah. One day we had a violent quarrel ; I told her I would leave her, and she retorted by saying, that as I did not love her, I might do so. That evening, while sitting alone in the verandah, brooding over my wrongs, I became aware of a tumult below, and caught sight of Spanish uniforms. A few words I overheard convinced me that my retreat was discovered, and that they had come to arrest me. As they ascended to the first story, where I was, in order to search the house, I lowered myself down one of the balcony pillars, and ran like a deer. Fortunately, I was not seen, and escaped to the sea-shore.

But what to do now ?—ah ! that is indeed a question.

While walking along the beach, and debating this in my mind, I saw approaching me from the town a party of three sailors. I hastened to conceal myself. When they arrived opposite to me they commenced undressing. They had evidently come to bathe.

Now I was attired in a very rich suit, in the Spanish fashion, which was a terrible misfortune, as in that garb I could not hope to escape by sea. What captain would, even if he were allowed, ship a fellow who looked as if he had just walked out from a masquerade ball ?

One of the sailors placed his clothes under a bush quite close to where I lay concealed. I quickly made up my mind, and when he went into the water, watching my opportunity, I drew them towards me. To doff my own and don these was the work of a minute or so, and then I cautiously stole away.

Self-preservation is the first law of nature, I said to myself ; and, besides, the suit I have left is worth ten times as much this

Notwithstanding my dangerous predicament, I could not refrain from laughing when I thought of the sailor's amazement when he found a rich suit of clothes in place of his own sea habiliments.

Togged out once more as a sailor, I boldly entered Havannah, asked for a sailor's boarding-house, where I stopped that night, and in the morning, having made the necessary inquiries, boldly sallied out.

In the pockets of the trousers I now had on, I found a tobacco-box, a knife, and a discharge from an American merchant ship, in the name of * * * *

That was evidently the name of the sailor with whom I had changed clothes.

So behold me before the American consul.

"What do you want, my man?" said the clerk.

"Permission to ship."

"What's your name?"

I gave the name written on the discharge-note.

"What nation?"

"A citizen of the United States."

"Where's your discharge?"

I placed it on the table before him.

Then the necessary permission was given in writing, and having put the consul's signature away, I went to the shipping office.

I was in luck again. Captain Butler, of the ship *George Turner*, bound for New York, was there engaging a man. The ship was to sail immediately, and he was only waiting for three more hands.

Two more came in while I was waiting. Everything was in order, we all signed articles, and away we went down to the quay, to go on board.

As I passed down the street where was the American consul's office, I saw a group of sailors hurrying along towards the consulate. Recognizing my own habiliments on one of them, I dived into a wine shop, and saw the Dutch sailor with whom I had changed clothes, rush in hot haste up the broad stone steps, doubtless full of his grievance—how he had been robbed of his clothes, his discharge, and other papers, and left in exchange a suit of long-shore togs.

In half an hour I was on board the *George Turner*—we

hove the anchor up, set sail, and away we sailed down Ban-noch Bay

As we passed the town, we had reason to believe some of my less fortunate shipmates were imprisoned : I looked up at the frowning fortress, and pitying them, blessed my lucky stars

Then my eye swept back—along the bay I could just make out the pretty villa, half hidden among the orange groves, where I had passed the last three months. I felt sad when I thought of Cora Nina, and what would be her feelings when she discovered that I had indeed gone.

However, to indulge in vain regrets was not a habit of mine.

“Adieu. Cora !” I said aloud, as though she could hear me—“adieu for ever !”

Then the *George Turner* hauled her wind, and passing round the headland, the villa in which I had been so happy was hidden from sight.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RODNEY'S FURTHER ADVENTURES.

“A RATTLING good yarn, Rodney, my lad, and one worthy of you. I see that you have not forgotten your old craft in that respect. What became of the girl, and did your ever hear of her again, or of any of your shipmates in that charming little brig with the harmless name ?”

“I have not seen nor heard of her since. Remember, however, it is not a year since it happened. As for those who left the brig with me, and were not so fortunate in escaping, they may be in Castle Muro, or, perhaps, poor devils ! they have experienced that pleasing mode of execution, common to Spain, and all her dependencies, called the *garrotte*.”

“Ah ! I have heard of it, but don't exactly understand.”

“It is very simple, my dear friend. You are strapped in a sitting position in a sort of arm-chair. There is a huge

iron collar which goes round your neck. At the appointed signal the executioner turns a screw, and the collar closes up together, crushing the bones of the neck, and producing a death most horrible to behold. Blood spirts from the nose, ears, eyes, and mouth, and even through the livid skin. The tongue is protruded in a manner most terrible to behold. If the object of a public execution is to excite terror and fear in the beholders, I know of no mode so well fitted to produce it as this."

"Well, but what of your previous life and adventures?"

"Ah! but remember, Geordie, my boy, that you have to tell your adventure first."

"And so I will, all in good time. First, however, I propose we go back to the theatre, and see this new actress."

"There is lots of time; it is early yet," said Rodney. "Let us stroll about the town a bit."

"With all my heart. By the way, old fellow, where are you stopping? Where are you going to stop?—what are you going to do?"

"Three questions all in a breath," said our hero, laughing.

"Why, Geordie, your curiosity is insatiable. In answer to your first question, nowhere—your second, where you like—your third, I haven't the least idea."

"Happy-go-lucky as ever," said George Vane; "years have made but little difference in your character, my boy."

"I beg your pardon—it has made a great difference. Since I have been knocking about the world I have taken a leaf out of Billy-go-easy's philosophy book. I assure you I don't worry myself about trifles now."

"Ah! Billy-go-easy!" Vane said. "Tell me about him. That, if I mistake not, was the old sailor you first met at the docks when you resolved to go to sea."

"Quite right; I have sailed with him several times since then. Where he is now, Heaven only knows; I daresay he will turn up one of these days. Both he and Black-ball Bob were to have been in Sydney this week. When last I saw them was nearly two years ago, and I made a rendezvous with both of them, hoping that we might all meet

together in merrie Sydney. By Jove, if we did, what a jolly time we'd have—what yarns we should hear!—eh, my boy? Such a week of it!”

“And now, Rodney, let's have a few, just a very few—a brief epitome of your career all round the world.”

“Well, so you shall; but it shall be a brief one. Rodney thereupon told him about his adventures on board the *Windsor Castle*, and his subsequent visit to the South Sea Islands.

“The South Sea Islands?”

“Ay, and a splendid territory is the sea-girt islets of Oceana. Some of the happiest days of my life I have spent in these earthly paradises, where work is play, and play work; where the women are all beautiful and the men all handsome. But why did you exclaim so suddenly, as if surprised?”

“Because I have cruised about there a good deal myself.”

“The deuce you have!”

“And the adventure I am to relate presently took place there.”

“By Jove, how strange! And we have been both cruising about in the same latitudes, perhaps at the self-same time.”

“Perhaps so—who knows?”

“How long were you trading about the islands?”

“More than eighteen months.”

“Biche-de-mer?”

“Yes, and sandal-wood.”

“Well, Georgie, old boy, you indeed surprise me. Who knows but that we may actually have visited the same islands—have sighted each other's vessels.”

“Very likely. What did you sail in chiefly?”

“A brig, the *Flying Fish*—and you?”

“A brig, the *Boneta*.”

“To keep it up, the *Boneta* ought to have chased the *Flying Fish*, as does the big fish the little one. However, I will get on. The first voyage we made was a very successful one. So was the second, and in a year and a

half I had saved over a hundred and fifty pounds. Then I took it in my head to go a long voyage, and I shipped in the *John Meihuish*, a full-rigged ship, for Calcutta. Wages were high—no less than fourteen pounds a month at that time from Melbourne, whence we sailed ; and as we were over two months on the passage, I had upwards of twenty-five pounds more to put to my stock. I had a week or two ashore in the City of Palaces. We waked up Play Street and the Sol Bazaar, as fellows with lots of money and bent on a spree will. However, after a six months' stay, I shipped for Boston in the *Polynesia*, a big ship, with a crew of forty men. Well, we arrived in Boston all safe in the *Polynesia*, without any incident worth mentioning. Yes, there was, though—one—and a very extraordinary one, I tell you. It is a sort of a ghost story, Geordie."

"Oh, come ! I say, now, Rodney. Don't try it on too strong. I can't stand a ghost."

"I tell you, Geordie, that what I was going to relate is quite true ; but as you seem inclined to laugh at the idea of anything supernatural, I will go on and skip it altogether."

But now his friend was very anxious to hear it.

"Well, go on Rodney ! I won't laugh."

"No, no ; you enjoy your opinion on the subject of ghosts, and I will mine."

"After we arrived in Boston——"

"I tell you, Rodney, I want to hear this ghost story."

"It is not a ghost story exactly, only something for which I can't, and never could, account ; but it doesn't matter : so I'll go on——"

"But it does matter," again interrupted Vane. "I want to hear it."

"Very well, then," said Rodney, gravely, "I will tell it you ; but only on condition that you don't laugh. If you do, I shall stop."

"Agreed."

One night, off the Cape of Good Hope, and before we had rounded that stormy promontory, I was on the look-out. It was the middle-watch, and my look-out was from

two o'clock to four. We were just in the latitude of the *Flying Dutchman*, and I was thinking about that strange old sea legend, and wondering whether, really and truly, there was a phantom ship cruising about, and doomed so to do, until the judgment day. The night was fine, with a stiff topgallant breeze, and short jumping sea, as there usually is off the Cape. Light clouds flitted over the sky, and around the horizon there was a slight haze.

"May I speak?" asked Geordie.

"Yes."

"Well I know what you're going to tell about. You're going on to say how you saw the *Flying Dutchman*. When you mentioned about the haze I knew directly. The beggar always comes out of a haze in full sail."

"My dear boy, without wishing to cast the least slur on your acuteness and penetration, I am in a position to inform you that you are entirely wrong."

"Then you did not see the *Flying Dutchman*?"

"Certainly not."

"Glad of that. Shouldn't have believed you if you'd said you had," growled Geordie, *sotto voce*. "Well, I suppose it's about some gloomy ship or other."

"I tell you again you are utterly and entirely wrong."

"Then what did you see?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, come now, Rodney, don't humbug a fellow."

Geordie Vane, after his old fashion, was doing all he could to provoke our hero. To his surprise, however, he found that he had lost the old power which he so often exercised for his amusement at school. Obviously either his once sharp weapon had grown blunt, or the other had put on fresh armour.

"Well, go on," he said; "I won't interrupt again."

Well, towards six bells the wind freshened a good deal, but still it was steady, and not a bit too much for the sails we were carrying. I was leaning over the capstan whistling and thinking of nothing in particular, when all at once I heard a voice.

"Aha!" thought Geordie, "now appears the ghost."

I heard as plainly as I heard you speak just now, these words, in low but distinct tones:—

"*There's a squall coming on; you'll take in the fore and mizen topgallant sails in this watch, and you'll arrive at Boston on the 13th of December.*"

I started, and looked round; there was nothing to be seen. No one was near me, I felt certain, for the moon shone at the moment, and lighted up the broad topgallant fore-castle where I stood. "That's curious," I thought; "I could have sworn I heard a voice." I thought a moment, and then came to a conclusion that I had heard a voice. I remembered the words, and repeated them again to make sure—"There's a squall coming on; you'll take in the fore and mizen topgallant sails *in this watch*, and you'll arrive at Boston on the 13th of December." I was certain that I had heard those words plainly and distinctly. I looked out to windward, and for some time could see no sign of a squall. But presently this part of the strange prediction began to be fulfilled. There came driving over the sea a haze, and over the sky light thin scud, through which the moon shone damp and dim.

"Ah! here comes the *Flying Dutchman*!" George Vane thought, but did not dare speak.

The wind freshened rapidly, and soon it was apparent that we might expect a sharp blow—nothing to give alarm, however, as the barometer stood high, and there was no sign of heavy weather in the clouds. Stronger and stronger grew the breeze, and just at seven bells I heard the second mate sing out from the poop—"Clew up the fore and mizen topgallant sail! Stand by the halyards!" and then, when all was ready—"Let go and clew up—away aloft and furl 'em." Up went the sails, and down came the yards, and in ten minutes' time the sails were safely furled. Still the breeze freshened. "Now," I said, "we shall see. The first part of the mysterious prediction has been fulfilled—to the letter. Of course, if the main topgallant sail is also taken in, it will be obviously all wrong—a false prophecy." So I

waited, and not without a feeling of nervous excitement, watched to see what would happen next. The wind rose steadily. As the squall swept over the ship she reeled over till her lee-scuppers were under water, and dashed ahead at the rate of at least twelve knots. I saw the second mate look up at the main topgallant mast, which at times bent considerably from the force of the wind, and knew he was debating with himself whether to take in the sail or not. Shortly after it struck eight bells, and the first part of the prophecy was complete. A squall *had* come on, and we *had* taken in the fore and mizen topgallant sails and nothing else.

When the mate came on deck he looked at the straining mast for a moment or two, spoke to the second officer and then followed the order—"Clew up the main topgallant sail." But this fact only strengthened the impression which the strange and mysterious voice had produced on me. Had the main topgallant sail also been taken in during the watch—that is to say, before eight bells—I should have thought no more of the matter.

The next day, in the second dog-watch, as we were all squatted about the foremast, taking our suppers, I ventured on a prediction on my own account. I'd been thinking of what the voice had said, and feeling certain that I had really heard it, I believed that the prophecy would be fulfilled to the very letter.

"Lads," I said, "when do you suppose we shall drop anchor in Boston Harbour?"

"About the first week in December, or the last in November," says one.

"It may be the middle of November," says another; "this vessel can sail a bit."

Several opinions, or rather guesses, were given, all to the same purpose. At last I spoke.

"You're all wrong," I said. "Not one of you have guessed the right week even. Now I'm open to make a bet I name the very day."

Everybody laughed at this—for I was only a youngster

then—and thought me mad or foolish. But I stuck to it, and declared that I'd bet.

At last one fellow, named Woodberry, who shipped in Calcutta as a boy, though he was thirty years old and upwards, offered a bet with me of an oyster-champagne supper, in Hanover Street, Boston, that I couldn't name the day. I took the bet, and said—

"Well, I name the 13th of December of this present year."

"God help us if it's the 13th of next year," said one, and then there was a general laugh.

"Seems to me one's as likely as the other," Woodberry put in.

"Let them laugh that win," I said.

"You'll have to pay for the supper, and no mistake," said Woodberry.

Well, to cut it short, we sailed on and on, and having a lot of calms and baffling winds about the time, it became certain that we should make a longish passage of it.

We got into the Gulf Stream the last day in November. There was plenty of time to be in on the day I named if we had good strong fair winds. And for a time we did have good winds, and the men began to talk and whisper among themselves, and be half doubtful whether, after all, there wasn't something in what I'd said. I was so confident, Geordie, that I staggered a good many of them, I tell you. Well, now, I'll get right on to the finish. On the 12th of December, at noon, we were nearly three hundred miles from Boston Harbour.

Still, if the present wind held, we might possibly get in on the next day, the 13th, though it would be sharp sailing. We were going a good ten knots, with a spanking breeze broad on the starboard beam. But towards evening it gradually died away, and at eight o'clock when I went to turn in till twelve, we were crawling along at the rate of about three knots only. The wind fell all through the night, and at noon the next day it was dead calm, and we were still a hundred and sixty miles from Boston Harbour. It was now obvious

to all on board that it was impossible we should get in that day, as there were only twelve more hours, and if we sailed along at thirteen knots all the time it could not be done.

I got finely laughed at and chaffed, I tell you, old boy, and was down in the mouth considerably myself. At eight bells in the afternoon the breeze freshened up again, and on we went at some eight knots. Still, however, there was no chance of doing it in the time, and I began cursing my folly for boasting so, besides losing a champagne supper to all my watch. Before eight o'clock, however, it fell nearly calm again, with a thickish fog. It was my watch on deck, and look-out too, just as w'en I'd heard the mysterious voice. I hadn't been perched on the fore-castle long when I made out a sail through the mist, and sang out—

“Sail ho !”

In ten minutes more the craft was close alongside—a boat was lowered, and a man came on board. I didn't think much of it at the time, supposing it was some fisherman's cutter, and the skipper had come to swop fish for grog or tobacco : however, there went a murmur round the ship, and the news was by-and-by that the Boston pilot was aboard.

The wind again rose, and before nine o'clock there was a stiff eight-knot breeze. The fog was thickish, but the pilot knew the ground well, and keeping the lead going, wasn't afraid. At eleven, we sighted Boston lighthouse—at half-past, we sailed into the bay, and just ten minutes before twelve, let go the anchor, and I won my bet ; for of course the 13th wasn't over till midnight.

“Now, what do you think of that, Geordie, my boy ?”

“Well, I don't know what to think of it. Do you mean to say it's really true ?”

“Every word of it.”

“What about the theatre ?”

“By Jove ! how late it is—and where are we ?” said Rodney.

“Haven't the least idea—we've been wandering on till we've got right out of the town. Here comes a fly—let's hail him and be driven back.”

"All right ! where are we, cabman ?"

"Hooloomooloo, sir."

"Drive us back to Sydney."

"Where to—the theatre ?" said George Vane.

"Oh, confound it, no ! it's latish, and I'm tired ; let's go back to the hotel—what's the name of the one where you are staying ?"

"Prince of Wales—good house—good liquor—good grub—and one of the prettiest barmaids I ever saw—dark, and with such eyes !"

"All right," said Rodney. "I'm confoundedly tired—rather reef topsails than spin a couple of yarns, I can tell you, old boy. Never mind, though ; your turn comes to-morrow."

After supper, over a glass of grog, Rodney related his further adventures.

"Well, you see," he went on, "I stopped a good bit in Boston, and then shipped for New Orleans. Boston's a rare old town, if you've got money. It was winter when I was there ; and that's the best time for fun. Lot's of sleighing, and any amount of pretty girls."

"How many sweethearts did you leave there, Rodney ?" asked George Vane, with a smile.

"Well, let me see. There was Sarah Manning—she was the daughter of a farmer a little way out, and used to come in once a week. Then there was Jenny Macarthy, the pretty daughter of an Irish widow, who kept a first-rate liquor store. Then there was Phemia Hamblin, and—"

"Oh, there, there, that will do ; unless you've got an adventure to relate about each one."

"Well, I might one of these days favour you. but not now. It's your turn next, my boy."

"All right. You shall have mine to-morrow afternoon : then we'll go to the theatre, have a jolly evening, and the next day lay our plans for the future. Blaze away ! Let's hear where you went, and what you did ; just a bare outline, you know, up to the present time."

"Well, I went to New York, and shipped as able sea-

man on board the *Aguila*, bound up the straits ; that is, up the Mediterranean. This was a pleasanter voyage much, and took up about five months, so that it was late in summer when we got back to Boston. After that I shipped in the barque *Bay State* for Hong Kong, where I left her, not liking the ship nor the crew, nor anything belonging to her. I'd been in Hong Kong before, and didn't like it, so shipped for Manilla, whence I again engaged in a trader to the South Sea Islands. This voyage was about the best of any I've been as yet. The vessel was a fast-sailing brig called the *Antelope*, well found, well manned, tight, seaworthy, and every way comfortable. I had some rattling games down in Polynesia, I tell you. But I won't go into that now. Perhaps when you've spun your yarn, I may be tempted to give you some of my further experiences in the 'happy islands.'"

"Why, this must have been just about the time I was cruising in the South Seas," put in George Vane.

"Just about. Pity we didn't fall in with each other. However, this pleasant life did not last for ever. We soon got a cargo, and it was my duty, as second mate, to be in the hold to 'stow' it. This took us three weeks, and then, when fully loaded, we weighed anchor, and set sail for New York. Thence I went on to Boston, by rail, and there I stopped for a long time, spending money like dirt.

"This was the time when I shipped as second mate on board the *Turtle Dove*, on board which vessel occurred the terrible scrimmage I related just now.

"After this Havannah adventure, I began to think of getting to the Southern hemisphere once more, as the time appointed for our rendezvous was getting near. So I shipped as third mate on board the *Flying Cloud*, bound to Melbourne, and when all hands deserted her there, I did likewise, seeing no advantage in remaining in an empty ship. Then I came on here, paying my passage by sea, and had been in this town of Sydney, which the people proudly call the Queen of the South, about a week, when the day arrived, and we met, according to promise.

"There, now, I think I've been a pretty long round, and

given you just an outline of my experiences, with one in full. Are you satisfied ? ”

“ Perfectly, old fellow.”

“ Then let’s go to bed. To-morrow you will have to do likewise, and render a strict account.”

“ I will do so to the best of my ability. But, Rodney, I must own, before we begin, that my career has been neither so varied nor so eventful as yours.”

“ Well, let’s turn in ; I tell you I’m as tired as a dog.”

“ Shall I ring for another glass of grog ? It’s past twelve, and after that time the pretty barmaid I spoke to you about generally brings up any grog ordered.”

“ Ah ! well, won’t she keep till to-morrow ? ”

“ Well, I suppose she will,” replied his friend, laughing ; “ that is, if no one runs away with her.”

“ Well, good night, old fellow.”

“ Good night.”

The friends shook hands and parted for the night.

Had Rodney known all, however, he might perhaps have waited up on purpose to see this said barmaid.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TWO PORTRAITS.

It may well be supposed that a lapse of four years had made great alterations in the personal appearance of both of our friends. Both had grown, and were now fine young men.

As for young Vane’s intentions—he was now within a month or two of being of age, which fact would necessitate his going to England to look after his rights—he was by no means such a fool as to risk losing the fine estate to which he was entitled by any neglect on his part, and well knew that his uncle, with whom he had not once communicated since he left England, would endeavour to make it be believed he was dead, and so possess himself of the property.

This by no means suited Mr. George Vane, and he **knew** it was imperative he should hasten back to England, and substantiate his claim.

This was George Vane's immediate plan of action. As to what he intended to select as his course of life afterwards, the undoubted truth is that he did not know.

Now, with regard to Rodney Ray, and what he proposed doing now that he had come to man's estate, and the whole world lay before him, it would have been as difficult for him to inform the reader as the reverse. He wanted yet more than a year of his majority. But even when that time should come, he had not the same inducements as his friend to hasten home. In his case there was no large estate which an unfriendly and avaricious uncle was eager to possess. True, there was a sum of money invested in the Funds—which would be his when he came of age. This, however, as a fortune to live upon, would be very insufficient.

He was very averse, after choosing his own course of life, to return and throw himself on the bounty of his father, and finally resolved that on no account would he do so ; that when he did return it should be with abundant wealth, enough to buy up the whole parish if he so chose.

There was one thought which made him feel sad and melancholy, and caused a sort of yearning feeling in his heart.

Notwithstanding what had passed, and that he had been treated with shameful ignominy, as he thought, he *could not* quite forget his old boyish sweetheart—Lucy Maitland.

Oftentimes, when keeping the lonely watch, her sweet face would rise up before him, her soft blue eyes he thought gazing reproachfully on him. Vainly would he dismiss the phantom. It *would* come again unbidden.

Nor did he fail to build certain castles in the air, in which he played a triumphant and heroic part.

He pictured himself as returning home enormously wealthy, and not without fame ; courted, sought after, and flattered. This was one side of his fancy sketch.

Then the other was Lucy Maitland, poor and friendless ;

her father ruined or dead, and herself left to the cold mercies of the grudging charity of a relation. The finale to this was to consist in himself coming magnanimously forward purchasing the house and grounds once occupied by her father, and anonymously bestowing them upon her. This, he thought, would amply repay her generosity to him in lending him the seventeen pounds when he ran away from school.

There were, however, two essentials for the playing out of this little drama. One was that Lucy Maitland should be poor—friendless—helpless; the other that he should be wealthy and powerful.

At present such was not the case in either instance.

Beyond this vague idea of making a great fortune, and returning home to play the *grand seigneur*, Rodney had no definite plan of action.

On the morrow Geordie Vane proposed that they should hire a boat, and sail forth on the lovely waters of Sydney Harbour, or, as it used to be called in the old convict times, Botany Bay.

"Then, you know, old fellow, I can lie in the stern-sheets, smoke my pipe, and tell my yarn; it's not much of a one—neither so long nor so exciting as yours."

This programme having been agreed on, the two friends went to the bar of the hotel, to order a supply of eatables and drinkables for the day, to take with them.

"By-the-bye," said Rodney, "where is this wonderful, dark-eyed beauty, the handsome barmaid you raved about so yesterday? I've not seen anything of her yet."

"I think this is the steamboat day," answered his friend in a most mysterious whisper.

"The steamboat day!"

"Yes, the steamboat from Melbourne comes in to-day."

"Well, what of that?"

"What of that? Ah! you don't know all."

"Whatever the deuce do you mean. Geordie?" asked our hero, now interested.

"Ah! my boy, there's a mystery there, I can tell you."

"Oh! bosh—nonsense!"

"Very well—yes—it is bosh and nonsense, as you say."

Then Vane commenced whistling, and affected that he had dismissed the subject from his mind; well aware, however, all the time, that Rodney's curiosity was now excited.

Our hero, however, would not ask, and presently the little hamper, containing bottled ale, cigars, a cold fowl, &c., was ready, and taking it with them, they sallied out into the street together.

As they walked down towards the quays, an open carriage came dashing up, drawn by two coal-black horses, each with a collar of bells in the American fashion. These bells created a great jingling, and attracted universal attention. Just as it arrived opposite our two friends, there was a block caused by two broad-wheeled drays, and they had a good view of the sole occupant—a young, elegantly dressed, and extremely handsome woman.

Everybody stared. The men admired the fair dame, the women envied her, and various murmurs and exclamations might have been heard among the group of pedestrians which quickly assembled.

"Ain't she a beauty?" said a tall cane-stalk, with a cabbage-tree hat on his head, and a stock-whip in his hand; "may I never take another nobbler if I wouldn't give every head of cattle on our run to be first favourite with that gal!"

"What a beautiful dress!" cried a woman in the crowd.

"Yes, and look at her earrings—real diamond ones!"

"Thrown on the stage to her last night in a bouquet."

Everybody stared, but not one of all with so rapt a gaze as Rodney Ray.

"Well, what do you think of her?" asked Vane, presently; "ain't she handsome?"

No answer—still the same steady stare

"Why, man alive, are you smitten with the girl?" laughed George.

"Like—the—girl!" replied our hero, slowly; "do—you—know—her?"

"Know her! Of course I do—so does everybody. Why,

it's the new actress I wanted you to come back and see last night."

"Oh ! now I understand. Come along."

At that moment the obstruction caused by the two drags was removed by one drawing ahead of the other. At the same time the lady in the carriage cast a careless, haughty glance on the crowd lining the footway. As her eye fell on the group where stood George and Rodney, and just as the vehicle moved on, she seemed to feel suddenly interested, and, leaning forward in her seat, looked backward as she was driven away.

George Vane saw her look back, and as he had on more than one occasion thrown her a bouquet from the stalls, he flattered himself she recognized him.

The high-mettled horses dashed off at a rapid pace, and the next instant our two friends turned down a bye-street leading direct to the wharves.

"Well, old fellow ; fine girl, ain't she ? I rather fancy she remembered my signifying my approval of her the other night. Did you see how she looked back ?"

Rodney laughed.

"What are you laughing at ?" asked Vane, a little nettled.

"You asked me what I think of her," was the evasive reply. "I think she's a splendidly handsome creature."

"So she is—so she is," cried Vane, who himself was quite smitten by the lady's beauty.

"Ah ! and you thought she remembered you throwing a bouquet the other night. Eh ! old fellow ?"

"I didn't say so," replied Vane, with studied caution, but by no means ill pleased ; "that is, not positively. She certainly did lean forward and look back, though."

Our hero, if he had one failing more conspicuous than his many others, could undoubtedly lay claim to an eternal spirit of mischief, which urged him sometimes to make fun of the most unsuitable subjects. In this case, however, he was not without justification. George Vane had tried to torment him by his hints as to the mystery of the handsome

barmaid and the Melbourne steamer---a mystery which he was not inclined to clear up without being pressed to do so ; and Rodney did not mean to gratify him. He now saw a chance, however, of a noble revenge. He would play off a practical joke on his friend.

Once or twice there arose a whisper within his breast that what he purposed was not quite right and honourable. Not with regard to Vane, but the lady. However, his rollicksome disposition overbore his better nature, and he resolved to carry out the bit of fun he contemplated.

While sailing over the waters of Botany Bay, Rodney matured his plan. He threw out his bait right skilfully, and the fish swallowed it.

Beware, though, keen fisherman, that thyself art not caught in the net !

"Stay, Geordie ; that girl recognized you, I'm sure."

He said this so innocently that his friend had no thought of guile.

"You think so, do you ?"

"Well, she certainly looked hard at us."

"Yes, that she did, and leaned right out of her carriage."

"Faint heart never won fair lady, old boy, is an old adage and a true one."

"Ah ! yes, that's all very well ; but in this case, you know, what can a poor fellow do ?"

"Well, I'll tell you---first put me up to the mystery of the handsome barmaid and the Melbourne steamer."

"So I will, Rodney ; ease off that sheet a bit, and we'll run down and lie under the lee of Pinch-gut for half an hour."

Pinch-gut was a small island in Sydney Harbour, on which was a battery of guns.

Here, lying half becalmed, and with the sail lazily flapping, George Vane revealed this mystery, so far as he knew.

"I've been in Sydney some weeks, Rodney, and have made particular friends with this girl."

"Oh ! have you ?---been making love, I suppose. Look out I don't cut you out."

"I'll bet you don't."

"What will you bet?"

"What you like."

"A sovereign—a supper—and a bottle of wine."

"Done—I accept the wager."

George Vane had unbounded confidence in his influence with the fair sex; as we have already said, not entirely without reason.

"Very well—that's settled; now go on about this mysterious Melbourne steamer and the pretty barmaid."

George Vane plunged ahead at once.

"This girl is in great terror. I don't know exactly what she is afraid of; but I know it's some one whom she expects, and fears will come by each Melbourne boat. I said some one—it's not one, but several, as I gathered from a few words she let drop one day. She seemed half inclined to tell me everything, but yet hesitated, and I suppose decided not to—at present, at least. Anyhow, she didn't.

"What, is that all you have to say?" growled Rodney.

"No, that's not all, nor anything like all. She knows where there's a *quarry of gold*."

Rodney Ray started to his feet.

"A quarry of gold! What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say—a quarry of gold—a place where you can quarry it out in big blocks, as you might slate in England—a place where there's tons of it—a golden valley, in fact."

"Now look here, Geordie," said Rodney, sitting up, and knocking the ashes off his pipe; "I've the very greatest respect for you, but I don't want any of your infernal lies."

"You're a nice fellow to talk about lies," replied Vane, laughing, "you might be polite enough to soften it a little. I swallowed your prophetic ghost, and your Havannah adventure, Cora Nina, and all that sort of thing, and didn't call them lies. However, it doesn't matter; since you won't believe me, I will 'for ever hold my peace,' as the parson says when he proclaims the banns of marriage."

"No, no, go on; it's all true. I'll grant you that or anything else you like—half a dozen gold quarries."

"This girl is in mortal terror of some men who she thinks are following her about."

"Why should they follow her about?"

"Ah! that I can't say. From what I've gathered, I have my suspicions. I've formed a sort of theory. I think that this gold quarry belongs to them, and she having possession of the secret, they are afraid lest she should betray it."

"But in the devil's name," interrupted Rodney, "if they've got a gold quarry, why don't they quarry out as much as they want—a ship load or two, say, and have done with it? surely they might employ themselves better than watching the girl."

"My dear boy, you don't consider. Now, I have looked at the thing in a philosophical point of view, and I believe they have too. Don't you see, that if the existence of this golden valley were known, it would be valueless?"

"What, the gold valley?"

"Yes, and the gold; it wouldn't be worth twopence an ounce."

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Rodney, sitting bolt upright all at once, "that there's enough of it to swamp the markets of the world, to render gold a comparatively worthless metal?"

"Yes, my boy, millions of tons of it."

"Oh! come, I say now, I can't stand that."

"But I stood your yarns about the prophetic ghost and the Spanish dancer, like a lamb. Fair play."

"Yes, yes," said Rodney impatiently, "but do you really mean to say that this girl knows where there's a golden valley—a place all gold—a gold quarry—millions of tons of it?"

"Yes, I do."

"Now look here, Geordie—we haven't seen each other for four years back, till yesterday. On your word, do you mean to tell me that this pretty barmaid you rave about knows where there's a place rich with gold?"

"Yes, I do."

"How do you know it?"

"I heard her say so."

"She told you so?"

"I didn't say that."

"You said you heard her say so?"

"Yes, but she didn't know I heard her."

"Then she was telling it to some one else."

"No."

"Oh! confound you, Geordie, I can't stand this any more," cried Rodney, starting to his feet in a state of real excitement, and nearly upsetting the little sailing boat.

"Very well, my boy; sit down and I'll spin you my South Sea Island yarn."

Now Rodney was, so to speak, furious at this. George Vane's coolness was too much for him. He thought he knew enough of his friend to be certain that this extraordinary tale, of which he had given a brief outline, was not all an effort of the imagination.

That sort of thing was not in George Vane's style. Our hero felt perfectly convinced that there was some foundation for his extravagant statement.

Still, however, he would not own himself defeated, and therefore acquiesced apparently in the other's proposal that he should first spin his yarn.

"It's only a short one, you know, Rodney, and *all true*, so it won't be so interesting as yours."

"Go ahead."

"And if you hear me patiently, I'll tell you what I'll do."

"Something very generous, I don't doubt."

"I will tell you *everything* I know about this girl with the gold quarry."

"Girl with the gold quarry! I like the cool way in which you speak of it."

"Yes, I will; and what's more, I'll give you leave to make love to her, and cut me out if you can."

"Thank you—I'm much obliged."

Now Rodney, whose curiosity was really excited about this gold valley affair, turned the whole thing over in his mind. He had formed a plan by which he would have the laugh at his friend—play off a practical joke at his expense.

George Vane, on his part, had treated Rodney to a story, which, though not altogether a fiction, was yet extravagant in the extreme ; however, the said George Vane had stimulated our hero's curiosity, and then, in the most provoking manner, shut up just at the most exciting part, waiting to be pressed for further revelations.

Rodney saw that to elicit more from his friend, it was necessary to entreat him—to make a favour of it—and as it must be done, he resolved to do it. But with a proviso. He would first make sure that Mr. Vane should fall into his trap with regard to the beautiful actress.

"I tell you what, old boy," our hero said, apparently with the utmost frankness ; "I'll make a compact with you."

"Of what nature ?"

"This—you spin your yarn, and then tell me all you know about this girl and the gold mine."

"Quarry—gold quarry—that's the word for it."

"Very well ; if you tell me all, everything you know, and introduce me to her, I'll tell you how you can make an appointment with that actress girl—the one we saw in the carriage with the jingling horses."

"Yes, that's all very well—you may tell me how to call spirits from the vasty deep ; but, as Shakespeare very truly remarked, 'will they come ?'"

"She'll come, I'll engage."

"What ! you'll engage that, if I make an appointment with that lady we saw in the carriage—the celebrated foreign actress—you'll engage that she'll come ?"

"I will."

"When and where I name ?"

"Yes, in reason. I'll engage that if you write in the terms I dictate, she'll come to the hotel at any reasonable time. Of course, if you are to appoint an hour when she must be at the theatre, it would be ridiculous."

"In the terms you dictate ?" said Vane, suspiciously ; "you won't mention names ?"

"No, I'll simply tell you to say the gentleman whom she

saw this afternoon, when her carriage was stopped by two drays in the road."

"And she'll come?"

"I'll guarantee she will."

"Then it's a bargain. I'll introduce you to the handsome barmaid with the gold quarry."

"Agreed!"

"Agreed!"

A pretty kettle of fish these two wild, young fellows were preparing! But they neither of them guessed at the result—least of all Rodney Ray. And now for George Vane's South Sea Island yarn.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GEORGE VANE'S YARN.

I WAS on a brig called the *Black Dog*, and we were sailing in the South Seas—the object of our cruising among the islands was to obtain biche-de-mer, coral, sandal-wood, and tortoise-shell. Our first trip was not very successful, but at one of the islands where we put in, our skipper heard wonderful accounts of a spot—at no great distance, hitherto unvisited by white men, and where, in addition to the usual products, there were great mines of—

"Oh! yes, there you go again—another gold quarry," Rodney again interrupted, sharply.

"My dear friend, you are quite wrong; you are far too sharp. I said nothing about gold, and was going to say nothing about gold—"

"Well, go on. What were you going to say—a silver mine, I suppose, or a diamond mine?"

"Nothing of the sort—a *copper mine*, or rather a valley lying between volcanic hills in which there was an abundance of copper ore."

Rodney became suddenly interested. "What was the name of the island?" he asked, sharply.

"Don't know; there was more than one tribe of natives on it, and I heard it called by so many different names that I wouldn't say which was the proper one."

"Was it called Kokoroko?"

"That was one of the strange names," cried Vane in astonishment, "which I had often heard the natives make use of—you—did you know?"

"Never mind; you go on with your yarn. First, however, how came your skipper to believe the tale of this island with the copper ore? Such a thing has never been heard of in the South Seas before, and the islanders are not to be believed—not because they are liars exactly, but on account of their vivid imaginations, by which they clothe a vague rumour or legend in the garb of truth."

"The chief who told our skipper about it showed him some copper weapons and implements, which had been taken by his people from some of their war canoes."

"Among these weapons did you ever see a sort of club or staff with a cross surmounted by a ball of metal on the top?"

Geordie Vane now looked indeed astonished. "Why, how the deuce do you know anything about it?"

"Never mind; go on with your yarn," said Rodney, stolidly.

Geordie Vane looked at him suspiciously, but could read nothing in his face, for Rodney had schooled his features to an expression of calm indifference.

Evidently, however, he knew something about this island. Vane did not feel half pleased at having the ground thus cut from under his feet, as it were—his story forestalled by Rodney knowing all about it.

However, it could not be helped, so he went ahead, confident that he had that to relate which would compel his listener's admiration:—

From what our skipper heard, he resolved to sail in search of the island, which he had reason to believe was not distant more than a couple of hundred miles. So we weighed anchor

and sailed. The wind was light and the sea smooth, so we were enabled cautiously to feel our way among the coral reefs, sunken rocks, and innumerable small islands. As we approached the place where the island we sought after was supposed to lie, the navigation grew difficult in the extreme, even perilous. Myriads of small islands—some of them not more than fifty and a hundred yards in diameter—speckled the surface of the sea. From many of these there ran out reefs which it required our utmost vigilance to avoid. Two men were kept at the masthead all day looking out for broken water and sunken rocks. These latter could be made out as dark patches in the sea, and thus we contrived successfully to avoid them. These small islands were not inhabited so far as we could see, although there was abundant vegetation on them.

Within this group of islets there lay, we felt certain, a large island or islands. We were sure of this, because we could discern the dim outline of lofty mountains whose summits were clothed in dark clouds.

It took us nearly a week to thread our way through the fifty miles or so, where, in the centre of this group of many thousands of islets, lay a large, long island, luxuriant with vegetation all along the belt of land from the sandy beach to half way up the slope of the hills, the ridges of which ran parallel to the coast.

The higher slopes of the ridge, up to the very summit, were densely crowded, and presented a most lovely appearance from the sea.

The island seemed about forty-five miles in length ; as for its breadth, at the time we had no means of judging.

We got safely through all difficulties, and anchored off this island, which I named *Cuprum*—the Latin for copper.

We did not go ashore the first night, but till a late hour stood about leaning over the bulwarks, gazing at the twinkling fires which gleamed from out the pleasant groves where we considered the villages of the natives lay.

But there was something else which gave rise to much wonder and speculation. Before dark we could make out a

huge dark cloud far away to the southward, which seemed to overhang and surround the summits of lofty mountains whose dim outlines we could discern.

After dark, however, this cloud, as we thought it, seemed to glow with a dull livid light, and occasionally we could distinctly make out flashes of red fire.

It was not long ere our captain came to the conclusion that the island was volcanic in origin, and that the subterranean fires were continually smouldering in the mountain's bosom, occasionally breaking forth in fire and smoke.

There was nothing particularly alarming in this, as there are in many parts of the world volcanoes which are always more or less active.

So this discovery was matter for wonder and speculation, but not for alarm.

Another watch was kept all night, but nothing of any moment occurred. In the morning, however, a great number of canoes were discovered making towards the brig.

Orders were given to be in readiness to give them a warm reception should their intentions be hostile. Accordingly, the two small cannons were loaded with canister : cutlasses, muskets, and ammunition served out to the men, and every necessary precaution taken.

After a bit, a big double canoe paddled up alongside. In it were a chief, as he appeared, and full thirty men.

Not without a good deal of hesitation this fellow came on board, and was received with every politeness. He was a fine, tall, handsome fellow—a good deal tattooed, and with a sort of tunic made of sea-shells, worn round his waist. He carried a long spear and a short sword, not unlike those of the old Roman foot soldiers. These, I saw at once, were made of bright burnished copper ; and then we all knew that we had hit upon the right island—the one we had heard such wonderful tales about.

Having been conducted to the cabin, the mate proceeded to act as interpreter, and explain to this fine savage that our aims and intentions were peaceful.

When it was explained to him that we only wished to

trade with his people, and showed him the wealth of attractive articles we had in the way of ornaments—beads, coloured and white linen cloth, and all the variety of merchandize which ship captains take on these trading voyages—his delight knew no bounds. In a very short time we were on the best of terms with this amiable savage. His men were allowed to come on board, although they were armed. Precautions, however, which, as it turned out, were unnecessary, had been taken by the captain against treachery. The two small cannons were kept loaded, and with a guard over them, ready to sweep the decks.

The abundance of copper weapons, implements, and utensils, soon convinced the most sceptical, that a vast mine of ore must exist somewhere in this island. Knowing their limited appliances for smelting, I came to the conclusion that the copper must be very nearly in a perfectly metallic state, as otherwise they could never have been able to free it from impurity so as to present the bright burnished appearance which it did.

At eight bells—that is to say, noon—the captain ordered the decks to be cleared of the natives. When this was explained to the one who came on board first, and who appeared to be a chief of high rank, he at once shouted a few short words of command, and in an incredibly short space of time all had clambered into their canoes, and were paddling away.

The chief or king remained on board, obviously utterly without fear or suspicion. As now that his followers had left, he was quite in our power, this unsuspiciousness impressed all hands very favourably with his good intentions. As it happened, he was very intelligent, and the mate was able to converse with him easily. Even I and the sailors, who knew little of the island languages, could make ourselves understood.

So soon as this was discovered he was eagerly questioned as to the existence of the copper mines which were to make all our fortunes.

We pointed to and touched the copper spear he carried—

heavy and burnished—more as an insignia of rank, it seemed, than as a weapon of war, and then asked him where he procured the metal.

Instantly he pointed towards the distant mountains, around which still clung the heavy cloud-like smoke.

“Ah!” I asked—speaking his tongue as well as I could—“there is plenty of it there?”

He bowed his head proudly.

“Enough to fill this ship?”

When he understood, he laughed aloud, and then pointed first to the brig, and then touched his hair significantly, separating the long luxuriant locks, and seeming to say—

“Can you count these?”

He meant that there was enough copper to load as many ships as there were hairs on his head.

When the chief had taken his departure, which was very shortly, the skipper called us all aft, and made a short address, explaining what he proposed to do.

“My lads,” he said, “I think I see a good chance for us all to make our fortunes. We can do better than cruise about after a cargo of biche-de-mer and sandal-wood. In this island we have hit upon a vast treasure. I firmly believe that we can load the brig with copper ore worth £40 or £50 a ton at least, and what is more, make as many trips as we please. If I am not much deceived, we may get enough in one trip to buy half a dozen brigs. A wink is as good as a nod to a blind horse. Are you willing to go in for this business?”

“Yes, yes—hurrah for the copper-mine!” resounded on all hands.

And so it was decided.

So soon as the sails were furled, the captain ordered four of us into the starboard quarter-boat. We took with us muskets, cutlasses, and ammunition, and as an additional precaution, the mate, with four men also armed, followed us, with instructions to lie off a few yards from the shore, and look out for any attempted treachery.

The skipper had very little fear of anything of the kind.

but the natives of some of the islands are so capricious and unreliable, that he wisely determined not to trust them too far until he knew them better.

I was one of those who landed with the skipper. We were at once received with every token of welcome and cordiality, and, noticing that we kept our arms, and seemed a little suspicious, the chief, Maliatietia, gave the command, and instantly all weapons they carried, of whatever kind, were thrown on one side. This was sufficient to deprive us of all fear. The savages had voluntarily placed themselves at our mercy, and could not reasonably be supposed to harbour any evil designs.

We had no reason to regret this confidence on our part. Curiosity and admiration were the sentiments our appearance excited in their minds, and we soon found that it was an absolute fact that this island had never before been visited or even seen by any vessel.

It was not down in any chart, although the group of islets surrounding it was faintly shown in one which the captain had.

The chief, Maliatietia, at once, and freely, gave permission to our skipper to build houses on shore, and offered him a large plot of ground on the northern side of the harbour, and about half a mile from the village, for that purpose.

Our skipper had a grand plan—no other than to take possession of this island, rich in what was practically as good as gold—copper ore—by bargaining with the chief, allowing them a fair royalty, and granting everything which could satisfy the vanity of their savage minds. It was not as against them he wished to become absolute owner, but against other white men. He knew that should he take into port one valuable cargo of copper, the secret *could not* be kept. He well knew the nature of sailor Jack, and to expect a whole crew to hold their tongues about such a discovery was preposterous. So he resolved to make a title, and then use it to the best profit for himself and us all.

“Who the deuce put him up to that idea?” interrupted Rodney; “it’s just the very thing I suggested myself.”

"You suggested !" cried Vane, in surprise.

"I mean to say, I should have suggested ;" Rodney corrected himself.

"Well, since you ask me who put him up to the idea," said Vane, modestly, "I did. And now I will go on and tell you how we carried it out."

"All right, old fellow ; but I'm getting hungry ; we've been lying here nearly two hours. Let's run our boat in, have some dinner, and then over our cigars you can finish your yarn."

This proposal met with no opposition, so the sailors trimmed the sheet hauled aft, and away the little craft glided over the beautiful waters of Sydney Cove, and soon shot into the quay near the end of George Street.

"I say, old fellow," remarked Rodney, as they were waiting dinner at the Prince of Wales, "where on earth is this dark-eyed barmaid you raved about so ? I haven't seen even a glimpse of her yet."

"Where is she ? Why, didn't I tell you that this was the day for the Melbourne steamer ?"

"Yes—but that doesn't cause her to take a flight up in the sky, or a dive down in the sea, I suppose, does it ?"

"No ; but it causes her to lock herself up in her own room, I firmly believe."

They were both out together on a balcony which ran round the first floor of the hotel, looking on the street.

"Who the deuce are those fellows ?" said Rodney, presently. "They look like Californian rowdies by their red shirts, boots, and the knives they carry in their belts. But, by the way they watch this house, they might be detective policemen, or sheriffs' officers."

"Don't know, I'm sure ; they have a hang-dog look."

The three men in question quite justified George Vane's words.

Rough, bearded men, with hungry, wolfish eyes, and an air of mingled recklessness, bravado, and ruffianism. Though their clothes were dirty and carelessly worn, their boots unblackened, their hair and beards unkempt, their whole appear-

ance repulsive, it could not have been from poverty, for two of the three wore great rings of solid gold, hammered out of nuggets, on their fingers ; and the third, a tall, red-haired, and desperate-looking scoundrel had thrown over his dirty red shirt a gold chain which ran into a pocket in the top of his pants, apparently attached to a watch or some other valuable.

While our friends were yet regarding them, dinner was announced, and for the time the subject was forgotten.

After the meal, and over cigars and whisky toddy, George Vane proposed to finish his yarn.

"Hold on a bit, old fellow," said Rodney ; "don't you think it would be as well we put affairs straight with regard to the two ladies ? I promised you to dictate a letter which should bring the lovely actress here this very night, in this room ; and you promised me an introduction to the dark-eyed barmaid with the gold mine."

"The last is easy. As to the other—well, I'll say nothing ; let time prove."

"On the contrary, my task is easy ; it is yours which promises to be difficult. Seems to me your golden barmaid has bolted. I looked for her when I passed the bar to wash my hands, again when I went down to see if there were any letters for me. Again after dinner I made an excuse, but the dark divinity was invisible. I begin to think she's a myth, a creature of your active imagination, like the copper island—eh, old boy ? Touching this said island, by-the-bye, do you think you could find it now ?"

There was something peculiarly significant in the tone with which Rodney said this, which his friend could not well be off noticing. But his look was so stolid, he appeared to put the question so innocently, that his friend knew not what to think.

"Well, no, I don't think I could find it now, or you either." Vane replied drily.

"Why not ?"

"Never mind ; you will know in due time. Don't anticipate the story."

"All right. Now then about this letter."

"What letter?"

"The letter to bring this lovely actress to your side. Come, send for your writing-desk, and indite as I dictate."

"Don't possess such a thing."

"Then I'll ring for pen, ink, and paper. Perhaps the golden barmaid may bring it in, and if so I will introduce myself."

In this, however, Rodney was not gratified, for the dark-eyed beauty did not appear.

"Are you ready?" asked Rodney, when Vane was seated at the table with writing materials before him.

"Yes."

"Then write as I tell you. First head the letter to—
'The Signorita * * * * * Royal Victoria Theatre,
Sydney.'"

"All right."

"Then, at the other corner, date it, and write 'The Prince of Wales Hotel.'"

This having been done, Rodney thought for a moment.

"Now comes the important part; be careful and write word for word as I dictate."

"I will."

"If the Signorita * * * * * will condescend to come to the Prince of Wales Hotel to-night, after the performance is over at the theatre, the gentleman whom she saw, and who also observed her when the progress of her carriage was stopped by two drays, will be most happy to meet her, and in the company of a friend who admires her talent and beauty equally with himself, will be exceedingly proud to entertain her at supper, also any female friend whom she may choose to bring with her. On inquiring for the gentlemen who engaged the South-view room, she will be immediately shown up."

"And is that all?" cried Vane, throwing down his pen in astonishment, not unmingled with disgust.

"Ali! It is quite enough. Don't you know that brevity is the soul of wit?"

"Oh! bosh!—confound you and your quotations!"

"You don't suppose that I am going to send such an audacious epistle as this?"

"Audacious! What do you mean by audacious?"

"What I say."

"But it is respectfully worded, I am sure."

"Respectfully worded! The idea of wording such an impudent request respectfully! Upon my soul, Rodney, I admire your cheek."

"I tell you, Geordie, that letter will have the desired effect. Send it or not, as you please. I have performed my part of the contract."

George Vane hesitated.

"Upon my soul, I don't know what to do. Why, we have not even engaged the South-view room."

"But we can."

"Perhaps it's occupied."

"No, it isn't. I made inquiries on that subject. It's at our service, if we wish to engage it."

"Then it seems you really mean this."

"You ought to know that I always mean what I say."

After a little more deliberation Vane folded up the letter and directed it.

Rodney rang the bell, and when the girl who waited (men waiters were not to be had) appeared, he said—

"This gentleman has a letter he wishes taken to the stage door of the theatre."

Vane mechanically gave it to the girl, and the deed was done.

"Well I'm dashed!" he cried, fetching a long breath. "I didn't think I could ever have had such confounded impudence. I should have never dreamed of such a thing."

"Faint heart never won fair lady, my boy."

"Ay, but brazen face gets many a slap."

Rodney laughed.

"Don't be frightened, old fellow; she's got a bit of a temper of her own, I can tell you; but she's too much of a lady to slap your face."

George Vane looked hard at his friend—he could not

make him out. There was some mystery with regard to his friend, he felt certain. Rodney's manner all day had been a perfect puzzle to him. After the commencement of his yarn, when he seemed at one passage considerably surprised and taken aback, he had listened with a quiet, self-satisfied smile on his face, as though, forsooth, he knew all about it. His manner provoked Georgie Vane, who utterly failed to comprehend him.

"I tell you what it is, Rodney," he said, presently, "I can't make you out. It's my belief you're going out of your mind."

"All right, my boy ; go on with your yarn ; first of all, however, we'll engage the private room. Remember, you will have at least one lady visitor to supper."

This done, our hero disposed himself comfortably, lit his cigar, and prepared to hear the rest of George Vane's South Sea Island yarn.

CHAPTER XXXIV

GEORGE VANE'S YARN CONTINUED.

THE island on which we were was long and narrow ; the sea-coast on either side bounded by a line of low hills. In the centre, between these hills, was a trough like a valley, less than half a mile in breadth in some places. Now, though I had frequently passed this valley, I had never yet ascended the slope on the farther side. I imagined that when I did so, I should get a view of the sea on the other side. Nor was I mistaken in this ; for, standing on the top of the ridge, I beheld a broad expanse of ocean, stretching far away into the west.

There was a bay running deep into the land, corresponding to the one where the brig was at anchor.

Suddenly, as I gazed, I felt a bewilderment steal over me.

Why, it was the same bay !

This was the thought which flashed on my mind.

Yes, it must be! There was the bay, the sandy beach, the groves of trees—everything the same: and, as if to settle the point, there, too, was the brig.

But they had changed her anchorage, for her anchorage had been shifted.

How, too, in the name of all that was wonderful, could I have made such a mistake? And while I thought I was walking west, and climbing the opposite ridge, have actually retraced my steps, and gone back. It seemed almost incredible.

As I gazed, too, I began to notice certain differences, which I had not at first. Still, however, I could not realize the situation fully.

The big gun, a little way from the shore, was the next point.

All at once, however, I noticed a flag flying from her mizen-peak.

It was not the British ensign, but the American stars and stripes.

Then I understood it all.

This was not the same flag, nor was it our brig I saw.

The island had been discovered by others beside ourselves. As I looked, I saw a boat put off from the vessel and make for the shore, where a crowd of natives were waiting to receive them.

I saw at once, on the boat's crew landing, that they were on friendly terms with the natives, for they walked up together towards what seemed to be a village, half hidden among the forest of trees.

I stood for some minutes staring in stupid astonishment, till, by degrees, all this dawned upon me.

Then, with a heavy heart, I turned and made the best of my way back.

It might have been that, in the fact of discovering that the island was known and visited by other white men than ourselves, I felt a foreboding of coming disaster, and could not shake off the feeling which oppressed me.

So soon as I returned to my quarters I sought out the captain, and told him of our discovery. His astonishment was very great, but he by no means looked on it as so serious a matter as I did.

"I don't imagine there will be any difficulty on the point. It is not by any means certain that they know of the existence of this copper valley."

"They must be very stupid if they do not discover it," I said, "considering that they have nearly the same opportunities that we had. We cannot fail to see and remark the abundance of copper weapons and implements. The natives appear to set little value by the metal, and would at once point out where it was to be obtained."

"Well, well, we shall see. At the worst, I suppose we can work together, side by side, and each one load his own vessel."

After a little consideration the captain resolved on accompanying us, and himself having a look at the strange vessel; and though it was rather late in the afternoon, we set out, and, traversing the valley, soon stood on the top of the ridge where I had first seen the strange vessel.

The sun was approaching the western horizon, and its golden evening rays illumined the white bay, and, as it were, bathed it in glory. There lay the Yankee brig, moored at a distance of about two hundred yards from the shore. The United States' ensign still floated from her peak. There seemed to be no one on board of her; probably all hands were on shore, except, perhaps, one, who was not, however, to be seen.

Presently, as we surveyed the scene, our eyes were attracted by a concourse of people ascending a hill of circular shape, and the apex of which was the highest point anywhere around. The atmosphere was very clear; the distance less than a mile; so that we could distinguish from where we stood everything which took place. Prominent among the concourse of people were the men and officers of the Yankee brig.

"What are they going to do, sir?" I asked of the captain;

"they are carrying between them a long pole, or sapling, or something."

"Wait, and you will see," was the laconic reply.

When they got to the summit of the hill, the long pole was reared upright, and then I saw that it was meant for a flag-staff. So soon as it was fixed firmly in the ground, a flag was run up, and the next moment the stars and stripes were fluttering in the breeze. Then I noticed that one of the white men, probably the captain of the brig, seemed to be addressing the crowd. He frequently pointed to the flag floating over his head; then there was loud cheering, which we could hear even at that distance, and waving of hats.

"Ah!" said the skipper, moodily, "this will be a hard business, I fear."

"What is that?" I asked.

"Do you know what the ceremony we have just witnessed means?"

"No, sir, I can't say I do."

"The captain of that Yankee brig has taken possession of the island in the name of the United States."

"But we were here first, sir; we discovered it."

"That may be. It may be also that our Yankee friends will not be easily satisfied."

"Then let them think that the honour and dignity of Uncle Sam is concerned; nothing but hard fighting can knock sense into their heads."

"What shall we do, sir?"

"To-morrow morning I shall visit the brig; you, as being the first who discovered it, will accompany me; we shall then see how the land lies. Meanwhile say nothing to anybody."

The following morning found us again on the route to the retired bay where lay the rival Yankee brig. It was the last day of the taboo, and supposing all went well, on the morrow we should commence loading the brig with copper.

By noon we had arrived at the village—a mere congre-

gation of huts, and not to be compared to the little town which was the capital of our tribe. The natives gazed upon us with curious but respectful glances.

It was evident they thought we were two of the crew of the Yankee brig. Just as we reached the shore a boat put off from the vessel, and waiting till it arrived, the skipper requested to be put aboard.

Great was the astonishment of the second mate and the men with him.

"Jerusalem!—whar did you come from? Didn't know there was any white men in this place. Why, we're been and discovered it; and our captain's written a long dispatch to the government."

"How long have you been here? How long since you discovered the island?" asked the skipper, sharply.

The Yankee, however, was too acute for him, and turning up his eyes, said—

"Wa-al, stranger—I don't exactly know—something less than a year, though, I dessay. How long have you been here?"

"Oh, a long time. But I wish to see your captain, so if you'll put me on board I shall be obliged to you."

"Jump in."

In five minutes we were standing on the deck of the Yankee brig.

The captain went into the cabin, ushered by the officer who had command of the boat, while I remained in the waist.

I was instantly assailed with all sorts of questions as to who I was, where I came from, what I was doing there, &c.

I was guarded in my answers, much to the annoyance of the men. In a quarter of an hour the skipper came out of the cabin accompanied by the Yankee captain.

"I tell you it's impossible, since nothing can be done till my government has been communicated with. We've took possession of the island in the name of the United States, and I can't give it up if I wanted to ever so much."

"But look here, captain," as I heard our skipper reply—"it seems to me great folly our quarrelling about this.

'There's enough for both—enough to make both our fortunes—and as to your claim, it's one I can't acknowledge, as I discovered the island before you.'

"This island is under the flag of the United States. Yes, sirree, and as such, none but American citizens have a right here."

The Yankee stuck to this preposterous assertion, and it was evident that nothing but strong means could avail.

We returned to our bay with all speed, and that evening the skipper called a council of all hands.

He stated what had occurred between him and the Yankee captain, also informing the natives that the rival tribe claimed an exclusive right to the copper valley, and had sold that right to the Yankees.

The assertion that the other natives had this exclusive right was indignantly denied, and threats of instant war were heard on all sides.

Accordingly, it was decided that on the morrow the "bull should be taken by the horns." We would assert our right by examining it. From what he had seen and heard the skipper was of opinion that in all probability there would be a collision between the crews of the two brigs; that the Yankee would endeavour to drive us off by force, especially if the rival tribe would take up the cause.

Under any circumstances it was decided that we would not submit to be ridden over rough-shod in this manner. We would fight rather for our justly-earned possession, or at least a share of it. Such was the feeling of all. Our men and the natives were now more eager for fight, should the other tribe presume to question their right.

Maliatieta had by this time learned something of the use and power of firearms, and had even fired off a musket himself, a great achievement when his first terror at the novel weapon is taken into account.

So on the following morning we started for Copper Valley, as we had appropriately named the place, and arrived there before noon.

But though we had taken prompt measures, we found

that the Yankee had been before us. The entrance to the defile was blocked up, and as we advanced some hundred and fifty strong savages of the rival tribe leaped upon the eastern breastwork, brandishing their weapons and shouting the word "Taboo."

"Come on, boys; d—n their 'Taboo!'" cried our skipper, waving his cutlass. "Hurrah for Old England and the Union Jack!"

A cheer was the response, and then over we dashed, the natives following with wild war whoops.

The enemy did not wait to receive the charge, but beat a hasty retreat. There were only some ten or twelve of them, and these had probably been posted there as a sort of outpost.

A halt was ordered after the enemy had fled, and a brief examination of the earth breastwork, rough as it was, convinced us all that white men had assisted in making it.

The defile, or gully, was nearly a mile long, and towards the other end grew both narrower and more precipitous on each side. Where it opened into the upper gully it was not twenty yards across, with a straight wall of rocks on either side. Now our skipper was a cautious man, as well as a brave and determined one.

"Lads," he said, addressing us men, "this is a serious business. I have no doubt whatever that the Yankees have been at work here; and such being the case, they will have thrown up a stronger obstruction at the other end. Everything depends on our making a good beginning, because if we are repulsed at first, though we Englishmen shall be urged on like bull-dogs to fresh effort, our native friend will be discouraged. We must bear a hand and bring up the two small cannons. Twenty men to each can run them along at a trot. I don't believe they expect we shall come upon them with artillery, and while they are wondering, we can in half-a-dozen discharges smash up their barricades; and I have no doubt whatever there is a strong one at the other end of the gully."

This was greeted with loud tokens of approval, and four

of our men, with the mate and fifty natives, were sent back to bring the cannons and ammunition. Though they made the utmost haste, and nothing occurred to delay them, it could not be done under two or three hours. So a reconnoitring party was sent out and shortly returned, bringing the intelligence that the enemy were in strong force at the other end, and obviously meant to dispute our further progress.

No white men had been seen, but we all felt certain, nevertheless, that the Yankees were at the bottom of all this.

So soon as the two small cannons arrived, dragged up by a crowd of shouting natives, some sort of order was preserved and our army again advanced—the white men with two or three of the chiefs in front, and the cannons in the middle, while the rear was brought up by the other natives.

When we arrived in sight of the end of the gully, we saw a great crowd of natives looking much the same as those with whom we were.

Loud shouts and yells rent the air, which, for a time, precluded any attempt at parley.

At last, however, it was settled that an envoy should be sent, demanding a passage, and asking for an explanation.

This did not suit the taste of our native allies at all—they well knew what it meant—that their old enemies had plucked up courage, and, backed by the hostile white men, were again going to give them battle.

However, before shedding blood, the skipper wisely decided to give every opportunity for the opposing party to retreat, and let us pass.

However, this was but a vain hope, for the messenger came back with the news that the gully was under “taboo,” and that even if it were not, it belonged to them, and not to us. The envoy had seen the white men—the Yankees—who bore a prominent part in the discussion, and under whose orders the savages seemed to act.

So here, it seemed, was a pretty little drama about to be played. Two tribes of Polynesian savages about to make

war on each other, each backed and aided by an equal number of white men.

The skipper briefly explained the result of the mission, and concluded with these words—

“Such being the state of affairs, we must assert our rights, and, if necessary, fight for them. We discovered this island and bargained fairly for the right to load with copper ; and load with copper we will.”

Then he proceeded to draw up our men in battle-array. This was done in the following manner. Four white men were placed in charge of the guns, two to a cart. These were placed in the middle, in front of them a body of some forty savages, and in front of all the rest of our men, with the captain and mates.

As we advanced we could see there was a great crowd of people behind the rude defence which had been thrown up. But as this was shoulder high, their heads were only visible.

Our men were allowed to advance quite close, within fifty yards certainly, without molestation.

It was pretty evident by this that they did not know we had guns, however light, or they would never have allowed this close approach.

Suddenly a man—a white man—leaped upon the barricade.

“Hold hard there ! Don’t advance another step, on your lives.”

Our skipper stepped to the front.

“Who are you, who presume to challenge our advance ?”

“My name is George Jackson, and I’m captain of the United States’ brig *Eagle*. I have taken possession of this valley and island in the name of the United States, and therefore I warn you that you cannot be permitted to penetrate into the valley, which is a rich copper mine.”

“And I answer you, that we have more right in the valley than you ; and go we mean to and will, by fair means if possible ; if not, by force !”

“Ha ! I would have you be cautious. If you advance another yard you must take the consequences.”

"Very good."

"Now, lads," said the skipper, addressing our men, "we won't fire first. Let them fire, and then the bloodshed which ensues will be on their own heads. Steady ; keep all together ; come along with those cannons ; forward !"

Himself brandishing his cutlass, he led the way, and instantly there was a general advance. Hitherto, not a shot had been fired ; but scarcely had we moved forward three paces than several muskets were fired, and a shower of spears fell amongst us.

One of the natives was wounded by a rifle-ball, and two of our men by spears.

"Fire—and fall back," shouted our skipper to those in front, armed with muskets.

A volley was poured in on the enemy, followed by a flight of spears. But they were so protected and concealed by the breastwork that we could not tell what damage, if any, we had done.

Nothing could be seen but the tops of a few heads, and very shortly three or four musket-barrels were protruded from between crevices and fired at us.

"This won't do, boys—fall back—round with the cannon. That's the style ! Now then—lower the muzzles, and fire at 'em point blank ; aim low—no matter if the shot strike the ground first. Steady ; don't hurry—lower still. Fire !"

The word of command was followed by the roaring rush of the cannon-balls, which happily struck the rude defence our foes had thrown up nearly in the same place.

There was a cloud of dust and splinters which flew high in the air ; a scattering of dusky forms, mingled with some in civilized attire, and then, when the smoke cleared away, we beheld a great gap torn in the breastwork, through which we could see the hostile tribe scattering like sheep. The advantage thus gained was made good use of.

"Blaze away through the gap, lads—fire, you fellows with muskets—let fly with your spears, you black fellows !"

This command being promptly and energetically carried

out, caused a still further scattering of the enemy, who had been alarmed by the terrible report of the two cannon, and the havoc the solid round-shot made in their defence, which was barely bullet-proof, and quite useless against artillery.

"Forward, my brave lads ; the day is ours !"

"Forward !" I shouted, carried away by enthusiasm. "The day is ours, and so is the Copper Valley. Let's drive the audacious foe into the sea !"

This, considering that the sea was some miles off, was not a bad programme, but my words as to the Copper Valley inflamed our men's spirits with more martial ardour than any hope of glory could have done.

Forward we went at a run, the seamen leading, the natives following, yelling, and almost darkening the air with the spears they threw.

We rushed through the break we had made in their defence without opposition ; and soon were masters of this their first defence.

By the orders of the captain we halted here a bit to re-organise and look about us. The natives had betaken themselves to flight in sudden panic, as is the custom with nearly all savages, but we could see, nearly half a mile off, the white men headed by the Yankee captain strenuously endeavouring to rally their somewhat cowardly allies.

Our natives wished to push forward again in pursuit, but this was wisely forbidden, as the skipper could discern through his glass that the Yankees had succeeded in stopping the panic riot, and that all the white men stood firm together, partly sheltered by a rising clump of ground, from which they were prepared to open fire on us.

It was a very different thing advancing over open ground against determined men of the Anglo-Saxon race, to attacking and driving before us a horde of savages.

"Boys," said the skipper to our men, who were all impatient to dash at the foe again ; "those fellows mean fight ; I don't mean the naked savages, but the crew of the Yankee brig ; they've taken up a capital position, and I can see their long rifle-barrels gleaming out. They're lying on their faces,

most of the white men, and as we advance will pick a good many of us off, as sure as death ! ”

“ What’s to be done then, cap’n ? ” put in one ; “ we can’t stand staring at each other this way ; an’ as for giving up, I, for one, ain’t for that. Why, look at the copper there is laying about ; here’s a lump o’ it enough to make a pound’s-worth o’ ha’pence with. D—— it all, lads ! let’s stick to it ; our fortune’s made if we beat these cursed Yankees.”

“ Ay, ay, let’s at ’em again ; why this ere place is as good as a gold mine ! ”

“ Lead us on, skipper—bravo for the Copper Valley ! ”

“ Ay, lead us on, skipper, we was here afore them, and have more right than those chaps with their flaunting stars and stripes. Hurrah for the old red rag with the Union Jack in the corner ! ”

Then there was a loud cheer, followed by a fearful yelling from our savage friends, and then a rush forward.

Our skipper ran and shouted to them to stop, that he wished to address them, but so excited were all that it is doubtful if he would have succeeded, had not something else aided in stopping this wild, senseless rush.

This was no other than the spiteful hiss of rifle-balls which whizzed thickly around. Before they had gone a hundred yards three of the natives and one of our men had fallen wounded.

The fall of several men, and the nasty whistling of bullets, will often check young soldiers at the beginning of an action. It had this effect on our men, unaccustomed to warfare, and in the course of a minute they halted ; and then, not sorry perhaps of the excuse, hurried back to the captain, who was still shouting to them to stop.

They brought the wounded in with them, however, and when the enemy observed them in retreat the firing ceased.

The first thing the skipper did was to see to the wounded. Fortunately, none were badly hurt—all were flesh-wounds.

Soon after this the Yankee skipper leaped up on the rude earth-work, and fastening a white handkerchief to his sword, waved it in token of truce.

Our skipper was a gentleman and a man of honour, and at once paid attention to this. It was, however, a difficult matter to restrain our savage friends, who cared no more for a white rag than they did for one of any other colour. But by dint of shouting, threats, and some blows even, their onward career was stopped, and the parley was commenced by the Yankee captain.

"Wall, stranger—reckon you've fou't well, and hain't no call to be ashamed. Let's see if we can't come to terms."

"Very good. What terms do you propose?"

"Wall, now, I've took possession of this speck o' dirt in the ocean, in the name of the United States of America, and having done so, I'm duty bound to stick tu it."

"What then do you propose?"

"What sum will you take, all in hard cash—bright silver dollars—to give up all claim to this hyar place?"

"What sum will I take?" replied our captain, after thinking for some little time. "Well, I'll tell you—right out—the lowest sum."

"Go a-head. If you are reasonable like, we can trade, I guess?"

"Well, look here. I believe we've got a better right here than you, as we are here first."

"Tain't no matter. This hyar place belongs to the United States. The American Eagle hev put his claw on it, and it's done."

"Then the American Eagle will have to take his claw off again, or else pay my price."

"What air your price, stranger?"

"Twenty millions of dollars—which is equivalent to about four million pounds sterling."

"You're a pokin' fun, I reckon?"

"Not I, sir. I believe we've got a better right here than you, and if you don't agree to my price—why, we'll fight it out."

"I say, Britisher, I admire your pluck; but, darn your imperance! Twenty millions o' dollars! why, whar do you suppose I'm gwine to get 'em from?"

"That's your business. I shan't take a dollar less."

"Wall, then, that's settled—we can't trade."

"Have you anything else to propose?"

"Wall, what else I've got to propose is as regards the natur' of the fighting to-morrow; for I mean to fight till all's blue—don't know whether you do."

"I'll fight till all's black, and that's a deeper colour than blue."

"Wall, it seems to me, we both mean to fight considerable," said the Yankee, drily; "s'pose we settle about the manner of fighting."

"What do you mean?"

"Wall, I want to know if we can't save some o' this blood-and-slaughter business. Don't know how you've got on, but I will own that we've got it pretty stiff—among the niggers, I mean. We ain't got many white folk hurt. I knowed their valley, you see, and kep 'em out o' harm's way."

"If you are going to propose a single combat I will accept it if my men are agreeable. Cutlasses, I suppose," said our captain, coolly.

"Wall, now, I like your style. You ain't a bad pluck'd un for a Britisher."

"Do you like my proposal?"

"Yes, I do."

"Very well then, I will consult my men, and see if they will trust their cause in my hands."

"Stay a bit, not so fast. I like your proposal immensely, Britisher, but I can't accept it."

"Can't," was the slightly scornful reply.

"No, siree, and when you know why, you'll own I'm right."

"Well."

"I can't fight you right-handed, anyhow, cos it wouldn't be fair to my men. It unfortunately happens that I'm wounded. A splinter from one of your cussed shells broke my right arm."

Our captain took off his hat immediately. He had not observed before that the Yankee officer was hurt.

"Sir," he said, "I beg to apologize. I had no idea you were wounded."

"No, nor did I till I was knocked over. But to get on to business ; I'm a goin' to make a proposal now, which you can accept or refuse, as you like. We're about equal, as regards white men, and, if anything, we've got the best of it in niggers. I want to know if we can't settle our little difference without killing any more of the poor devils."

"With all my heart, if it can be managed."

"Well, then, this is my proposal. Let's toss up for choice. You've got your brig one side of the island, I've got mine the other. If I win you shall take up anchor to-morrow, sail round into our harbour, lay yourself alongside, and we'll fight it out that style, hammer and tongs."

"Perhaps your brig has heavier guns than ours?" suggested our captain, cautiously.

"No she ain't ; jest about the same. Two little brass cannons—an' a cussed fool I was not to bring 'em ; but the fact is, Britisher, I made too light of it—didn't think there was so much fight in you."

"Well, sir, I am inclined to agree to your proposal, providing everything is fair and square and above-board."

"You can satisfy yourself on that point by comin' on board before we begin ; or if you don't like to trust yourself, by sending a boy."

"Suppose I decline this offer."

"Wall, then, Britisher, I shall give you rest to-night, and camp just outside this valley, whar I know's there's a place not ten times your number could drive me out of. Then to-morrow I shall get my guns up and drive you, as you have drove me to-day. There'll be some bones broke, but I'll do it, by thunder !"

"I'll consult my men about it."

"Right ; let's know as soon as you can, as I want to get my men spliced up."

We could not help admiring the policy of the Yankee skipper, who was a small man, and at once fell in with the

notion. If we must fight, we might as well fight broadside to broadside and have it over sharp.

This business settled, next came the tossing to decide whether we should sail round the island to fight them, or *vice versa*.

The Yankee spun a half-dollar piece, and as our captain cried wrongly, we lost ; and it was decided that we should sail early in the morning in order that the little affair might be settled that day.

It was now evening, and we parted rather hurriedly, as we wished to get back to the brig before dark.

Our men gave a cheer for the Union Jack.

The Yankees returned a defiant one for the Stars and Stripes. The two captains bade each other a polite adieu.

I and the girl took an affectionate leave, and then we started off back across the Copper Valley.

Ere we got to the seashore the rumblings of what we at first thought to be thunder was heard, but we now discovered that the noise proceeded from the burning mountain, which was unusually active.

We got the cannons and ammunition safely on board by nine o'clock, and then, after seeing to the wounded, we proceeded to make all snug for the night.

I, for one, was thoroughly tired out ; fatigue and excitement together had such an effect on me that I threw myself on the deck, after taking some biscuit and a pot of tea, and fell fast asleep.

I was awoke by a violent tossing, and heard a noise.

I found it was twelve o'clock, dark as pitch, and that a violent storm was raging. All hands were called, and, weary as we were, we had to pay out cable to the extent of nearly a hundred fathoms.

The darkness was most profound, the wind high, and the heaving and tossing of the sea of such a nature as to astonish the oldest sailor amongst us.

The wind blew strongly dead on the shore, and this was the cause of some little alarm, until it was proved that the anchorage was good and the brig did not drift.

The storm was of such a nature that, tired as we were, none of us could think of sleeping any more ; and we clustered on deck, gazing out on the profound storm and the heaving sea, phosphorescent and terrible in appearance.

The roarings and rumblings of the volcanic mountain grew louder and louder, until at last the noise was perfectly frightful ; and then all at once there shot up into the sky a volume of lurid flame, followed by the most tremendous concussion of the air, and the loudest report I had ever heard.

In a minute or so after this a shower of fine ashes fell, and covered the decks of the brig to the depth of at least six inches.

There was a lull for half an hour or so, during which the captain came forward and encouraged us by saying that this uproar and storm was evidently caused by an eruption of the volcano—an event not to be looked upon as unusual or at all terrifying.

Shortly after three o'clock in the morning we distinctly felt several severe shocks, as of an earthquake, the like of which never could have been produced by any sea whatever.

The whole surface of the water was covered with boiling foam, and ever and anon certain portions of the sea seemed to be heaved up in billocks, which, in subsiding, caused a tremendous series of waves and rollers.

Still, however, as the anchor held well, there was no immediate cause of alarm, and we put the best face on the matter we could ; though, I must say, I did not quite like it.

About four o'clock in the morning there was another tremendous shock of earthquake, followed by a burst of red fire from the mountain, and the most awful rumbling and crashing, like thunder.

The sea washed about in a most frantic manner—not in waves, but in great hillocks and mounds of water.

From four o'clock to five the uproar grew louder, the storm heavier, and the flashes of lurid lightning were frequent and terrible.

Then all at once there came a dull, prolonged roar, and a trembling of the sea, as though some giant-hand held it in a dish and was shaking it.

Next came a terrific rush of water, like a torrent, which swept the brig nearly under, and flooded her decks to that degree that we all had to take to the rigging. This rush of water—which seemed to be flowing down hill, for the vessel was on an obvious slant—lasted for some minutes. Then it ceased, and there came great eddies and whirlpools, which sent us round and round, like a cork.

These, too, gradually subsided, as did the noise and the wind.

It was still pitch dark, and as we were all utterly worn out, and the storm seemed to have abated for good and all, every man of us fell asleep; the anchor watch of two men left on deck also yielding to the drowsy god.

When I awoke it was broad daylight. The sun was shining, and it was a calm and beautiful day, and the brig lay quite still. I had **been** roused from my sleep by loud cries from on deck—cries of astonishment, not unmixed with terror.

I hastily rose, and going out of the fore-castle, was indeed astounded at what I saw. The first thought was that the brig had drifted out to sea, having parted her cable without our knowing it. A glance around confirmed me in this idea. Jumping on the fore-castle I saw all around, sea, sea, sea! No land anywhere.

Of course the brig had drifted; that was sufficiently clear.

But chancing to look over the bow I discovered that she was still riding to her anchor.

This was to me incomprehensible. At anchor in the open sea!

How could such a thing be?

There was not even one islet in sight; and then the thought occurred to me, how on earth could we have drifted through these without knowing it?

Presently my eye fell on a vessel, distant apparently

little more than a mile, a small vessel, a brig like our own. The Yankee ensign flew from her peak. Surely it could not be the one we had engaged to go and fight all for the sake of the Copper Island?

Everybody seemed lost in bewilderment; I could see the captain, pale and agitated, walking the poop, and ever and anon taking a look through the telescope at the other brig, which lay quietly at anchor like ourselves.

"Lay off, all hands," he said, presently; and off we all went, wondering what all this meant, and thinking we must all be still dreaming.

At least, I know I had great difficulty in persuading myself I was not.

"I suppose you all know what happened in the night?" he said, shortly.

We gazed in each others' faces in silence and wonder.

Nobody did know, but slowly a dawning of the truth began to creep over our minds. We waited breathlessly for our captain's next words.

"Well, my lads," he said, "there lies the Yankee brig. Do you all see the expanse of sea between us and her—blue, unbroken sea, without reef or rock?"

Yes, we all saw that.

"Well, yesterday, the island and copper valley lay there; it's all gone now, and we have to thank Providence for our own almost miraculous escape. There was, as you know, an eruption of the volcano on the place last night; it seems there's been also an earthquake, and the whole island has been swallowed up, engulfed, and left not a trace behind it."

After a time, however, we understood and could account for this terrible calamity.

The island was almost certainly of volcanic origin, perhaps heaved up from the depths of the sea in a day or night. In the same manner it had been engulfed. A vast chasm in the crust of this our globe had been burst open, down into the dreadful depths of which the fertile, beautiful island, with all its wealth—mineral, vegetable, animal, and

human—had been sucked. It was a terrible and awe-inspiring thought, and for full an hour we gazed out on the gently rippled surface of water between us and the other brig, scarce speaking above our voices.

The captain gave until eight bells in the afternoon to rest and recover ourselves from the fatigues and excitement we had undergone.

Then the word was given to weigh anchor. Here another surprise awaited us. The cable was nearly straight up and down, and as we had anchored in only five fathoms of water, we naturally expected that it hung slack and lay along the bottom, so that we should only have to heave the brig up to our anchor.

To our astonishment, however, we found that the anchor was nearly right under her fore-foot, and, on sounding with the deep-sea lead, we got a hundred fathoms of water.

It was very hard work, and it took us nearly two hours to heave in this amount of chain. At half-past six o'clock exactly we made sail, and stood over towards the Yankee brig. I was at the wheel, and guessed by the skipper's manner that he was going to speak her.

As we approached the Yankee brig we saw that she, too, was getting under weigh. A gentle breeze sprang up as the sun sank towards the western horizon, and the whole aspect of nature was so calm and so peaceable that it was hard to persuade ourselves that such tremendous events had happened in a night.

We were going with the wind free, but came up under the lee of the Yankee ; we backed the maintopsail.

"Brig-a-hoy !" our captain hailed.

"Hallo !"

"Well, we're come over to you according to arrangement."

The Yankee skipper, who was on the poop, with his right arm in a sling, was fairly taken aback at the coolness of our commander.

"Wall," he said, "Mr. Britisher, I've a good many o' my men hurt—but if you insist on your rights, I'll obleege you

—bnt, by thunder ' now that cnsed island's bin swallered up, I don't see what there air to fight about."

This was obvious and sensible ; nor had we any intentions of fighting and shedding blood uselessly or in mere bravado. Still we were all pleased at having taken a rise out of the Yankee, as we thought.

Then ensued a little friendly talk—we inquired whether our late foe wanted any medicines or medical comforts for the sick, and they in turn offered us preserved fresh provisions and vegetables, with which they were well supplied.

" 'Say, Britisher, you didn't get any copper from the valley, did ye ? "

" No."

" Not even a boat-load ? "

" No. Did you ? "

" Never thought of it. Made cock-sure as it was all ours—for in course we should ha' whipped you into splinters if we had ha' fou't."

" Don't think it. I'm sorry we haven't got even a sample. People will scarcely believe us when we tell the tale. Indeed, I feel shy of entering it in my log-book."

" Don't do it. I don't mean to enter it. Reckon I'll spin a tonghish yarn about it when I get home 'down east,' in Massachusetts. Say, thongh, haven't you got nothing on board to make sartin as all this wasn't a dream ? "

" Not a bit o' copper as big as a walnut."

" Whar's that painted devil you had as a hostage."

" By Jove, I forgot all about him."

He now remembered that he had been locked in one of the stern-cabins for safety.

In the turmoil and terror of that night nobody had given a thought to the hostage, and now, when he looked, lo ! he had vanished ! Without donbt, he had forced open the dead-lights and leaped into the sea, intending to cross the island and regain his own tribe.

Had he known what was about to happen he would doubtless have remained and saved his life.

Then the Yankee brig filled her main-yard and we doing the same, we each sailed away on our respective courses.
And so ends my yarn.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SURPRISING ANNOUNCEMENT—THE YANKEE CAPTAIN'S VERACIOUS ACCOUNT.

"AND a thundering good one, too, old boy," ejaculated Rodney; "but what makes you look so down in the mouth? What are you sighing about like that for?"

"Well, Rodney, I was thinking about that poor girl, and wondering what became of her."

"Became of her? Why, she was stewardess of the brig for four months, and on our arrival at Melbourne obtained a good situation as lady's-maid to a female relative of the governor's."

"*Our* arrival!" cried George Vane, starting up at this. "What in the name of thunder do you mean?"

"In the name of thunder, and lightning too, if you like, I reply that I know all about it, because I was on board the Yankee brig."

There was a dead silence.

George Vane stared in blank astonishment, dismay, and incredulity, at his friend.

"Oh, come, I say now, Rodney," he almost gasped, presently, "none of that. What I've been telling you is true—upon my honour."

"And what I have been telling you is true."

"Will you say upon your honour?"

"Yes."

"Say it then"

"What I've been telling you is true, upon my honour!"

Geordie rose and grasped his hand.

"There, old boy, I believe you. But it's perfectly marvellous; I can scarcely credit that I'm myself—that I'm here—that I'm anywhere!" he cried rather wildly.

"Now then, sit down, and I'll tell you all about it. I couldn't help interrupting you all through your jaw, because I witnessed a good deal of what you described myself. Well do I remember how those confounded shells of yours scattered the natives. Our captain knew it was useless to contend against artillery in the long run, but, as you suggested, looked to hold out till night, and then we'd have given you fellows pepper. You don't know what we had in store for you, old boy."

"What?"

"Why, we'd got two big guns in the hold, and lots of ammunition—cargo which we had brought out by a mistake of the contractors of a U. S. frigate. We meant to have mounted them in the night, and then, oh, lor'! wouldn't we have given your pop-guns pepper!"

"And we were actually in sight of each other—fighting against each other—alongside of each other in the brigs, without knowing it. By Jove! it seems like a wild romance! You never knew it till this day?"

"Never dreamed of such a thing until my attention was attracted by something you said as to copper weapons and implements. Then I followed you step by step in your narrative, and soon discovered that we had both experienced a wonderful adventure. By Jingo! what a tale our Yankee skipper made of it! Come, sit down now, and I'll tell you the extremely faithful account of our Yankee skipper, whose name was Jacob Scam, promulgated in his native seaport of Salem, in Massachusetts.

"First and foremost, he discovered an island, which, excepting a little belt of grit and sand round the coast, was all copper. Then he took possession of it in the name of the United States, as bound to do as a good American citizen.

"Well, then, he went on to state, that a British frigate

afterwards discovered this island of immense value, and strove to dispute the title of his government. That there was a desperate shore battle, in which he, with no cannon, and only the crew of his brig, kept at bay for a whole day, the entire crew, marines and all, of the British war-ship, and would have utterly routed them, but night came on—and he retired on board to see to his wounded, and to make preparations for a fresh desperate struggle.

“On the morrow, he stated there was a terrific battle, in which he finally beat off the British frigate. The island was very narrow, he stated, and so they fought across it. As a proof of the tremendous severity of the fire, he finally stated that, between them, *they sunk the island.*”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PARTY KEEPING WATCH.

“HA ! HA ! HA !”

“Ha ! ha ! ha !”

A burst of laughter on either side at this ridiculous statement on behalf of Captain Jacob Scam removed every trace of ill feeling, and the two friends were as cordial as ever.

“Well, now, I say, old fellow, what about this infernal letter you’ve written ?”

“To the actress ?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, that’s all right—she’ll come,” said Rodney, carelessly.

“And you are really serious ?”

“Serious ?—of course I am. I tell you she’ll come. What about your golden barmaid ?”

“What about her ? **you know what I’ve told you.**”

“Where is she ?”

"I can't say."

"Well, let's down and have a hunt for her. Perhaps she's in the bar."

Down they went together, rather in high spirits, and had a "nobbler" at the bar. No golden barmaid was to be seen, however, and had not Rodney known his friend better, he might have thought she was a myth.

But he was convinced that Geordie Vane was speaking the truth, so far as he knew, and felt an intense curiosity with regard to this mysterious maiden with black hair and eyes, and the golden secret.

They strolled into the street together, but Rodney suddenly remembered something, and, running back into the hotel left his card, with a message for any one who called for him, that he was to be found in a certain private room, where he and his friend had ordered supper.

This message and card were meant for the actress, who, he knew right well, would come to the invitation.

Then he rejoined George Vane, who was awaiting him some fifty yards on.

"I say, Rodney, look at those fellows—the same that we saw an hour or two ago. An ugly-looking lot. What the deuce are they lurking about here for, I wonder?"

Rodney looked, and saw the same three ill-conditioned-looking fellows who had before attracted his attention.

"Can't say, I'm sure—I don't know them."

No more was said, and the two friends strolled up George Street, turned into Pitt Street, and entered the Victoria Theatre.

They found that before the celebrated actress, with whom George Vane was so smitten, would appear on the stage, there was a two-act drama to be played out, and as neither of them cared about it, they again strolled out into the street.

"Oh, bother the theatre!" said Rodney, "I don't care about it to-night; let's stroll about. The girl can't come till twelve o'clock, and now it's only half-past eight."

"Just as you like," said Vane, carelessly; "for my part, I doubt whether she'll come at all."

"You don't doubt my word."

"No, dear boy, but I doubt the power of that singular letter you dictated to me to draw her."

"You need not ; she will come, rest assured."

"We shall see."

"All right, let's turn in here and get a cigar ; they say it's the only decent place in Sydney, and there is an uncommonly pretty girl here."

"Always thinking of the girls, Rodney," his friend said, banteringly. "You're a nice fellow, I'm sure ; what about Emma Malatieta, the chief's daughter, afterwards stewardess to Captain Jacob Scam on board the brig ?"

"Oh, that was merely a case of harmless Platonic friendship."

"And what about this actress ? I reckon you're smitten there rather, my friend."

George Vane coloured, and looked by no means well pleased—this was evidently a sore point.

"I suppose," he said, "a fellow can admire a woman's beauty and talent without falling in love with her."

"Some fellows can, but you can't, it seems."

Rodney was beginning to torment his friend again, who obviously winced under it. This was a very bad habit on our hero's part—one which time softened down, if it did not quite cure.

Just at this time, however, and when Vane was getting quite angry, they arrived at the bottom of George Street, opposite the "Prince of Wales" Hotel.

"By Jove ! there are those fellows again, in exactly the same place and facing the same way ; they seem to be keeping a strict watch on this hotel of ours," said Vane.

"Yes, after this golden barmaid of yours."

"By Jove, old fellow ! there's many a true word spoken in jest. Those are the very fellows the poor girl is in such mortal dread of."

Rodney laughed.

"Oh, nonsense !" he said ; "what put such an idea into your head ?"

"Upon my soul, I believe it ! for the girl has not been seen ever since the Melbourne boat came in."

Rodney again said "nonsense," but he was not entirely unaffected.

He crossed over the road and had a good look at the three men, who stood like statues, silently watching.

Then he rejoined his friend, and the two walked to the bar and called for cigars and "stone fences"

Rodney had seen the card he gave placed in a sash, and now it was gone.

"Ho, ho !" thought he to himself, "some one has been for it—I can guess who."

He did guess, and as it happened, guessed quite wrong.

"It's a beautiful night, let's come out on the water ; the water is calm, the air is light, and the lovely moon casts her rays over the placid scene—quite romantic ; come along."

The back premises of the "Prince of Wales" Hotel ran down to the shore of Sydney Cove, and here were moored several boats kept for the use of visitors to the hotel. Ships' boats and others, too, often landed their passengers here for convenience sake, as it was nearer than the public landing-place by the quay.

Adjoining the "Prince of Wales" Hotel was a tap and grog-shop, which was much frequented by sailors and watermen. There was a communication between the hotel and the grog-shop next door, by means of a staircase over an archway, under which archway was the way to the back premises, where were moored the boats.

The hotel and the grog-shop had once both belonged to the same proprietor ; now it was not so, and the communication between the two houses was stopped, at least so far as the nailing up of a door might be considered as sufficient.

The back kitchen of the hotel and the public-house alike opened on the space of ground at the rear, so that at any hour of the night the lodgers in either could reach their respective abodes by landing in a boat at the steps. The sole right to these steps belonged to the proprietor of the hotel, but he was a good-natured man, not inclined to be

unneighbourly, and allowed the use of the steps to the grog-shop also.

Under this archway then our friends passed. As they did so they heard the sound of a thundering chorus to a sea-song shouted by some fifty voices at least.

Obviously the company at the "North Pole" were making merry.

Suddenly Rodney halted, he thought he recognised one of the voices he heard in the confused din of the chorus. But after a moment or two he passed on, thinking he was mistaken, and walked with Vane across the large yard down to the steps.

There were several boats here, and Rodney was casting his eye about, to select, if possible, the one they had before had out, when his attention was suddenly arrested by a large boat like a man-of-war's launch. There were seated in her at least a dozen men, and four or five more were clustered about the steps.

Though somewhat surprised for the moment, neither he nor Vane thought anything particular of it.

They were gone on their sail more than two hours, during which time each had related other episodes in their lives during the last few years, which, however, are scarcely of sufficient interest to be reproduced for the reader.

On their return the same large boat was there still, and the men still in her, or hanging about.

"What the devil boat is that, and who are those fellows, I wonder?" said Vane; "one might think it was a man-of-war's boat waiting for an officer, if it were not for the rig of the men."

"Can't say, I'm sure. What a jolly row they're kicking up at the grog-shop!—sailors just come ashore I reckon."

"Very likely; let's walk up the town, look in at the theatre, then have a turn at skittles; and when we get back, I'll guarantee we find our lovely actress awaiting us."

George Vane looked incredulous, but said nothing.

As they passed into the street, however, he suddenly exclaimed—

"By Jove, there are the same three fellows still keeping watch and ward over our hotel; I tell you what, Rodney, there is something up!"

"Oh, nonsense—besides, it's nothing to us; the street is free to them, and if they like to stay there and gape at the hotel windows, they can do so."

"I can't make it out. I wonder if they have got anything to do with those other fellows with the big boat?"

"Ah!" cried Rodney, suddenly "I had not thought of that."

He paused for a moment, as if debating in his own mind whether he should accost the three men and ask them what they wanted; but finally thought it better not to do so. They were big, ugly-looking customers—these were rough times in Australia—and it would have been folly to have interfered. So they strolled up the town, looked in at the theatre, and shortly before twelve returned again to the hotel.

"There they are!" cried Vane, when they got within a hundred yards; "the same three fellows in the same place."

There they were, sure enough, standing with their backs against a dead wall, opposite a glaring light at the front door.

"Oh, confound them! come in," said Rodney, impatiently. "Supper's ready, or ought to be, and I reckon our visitor will be here in a few minutes."

They entered together, and passed up-stairs to the private room Rodney had ordered.

This room opened on to a balcony which overhung the back yard.

But what here occurred we will leave for another chapter.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MEETING.

RODNEY RAY and his friend ascended to the room, where the table was laid, the gas lighted, and every preparation made for an elegant supper.

Our hero had privately given orders that a repast of the most refined description should be prepared, and had written out a charming bill of fare.

The sideboard was decked with wine in decanters, while beneath, in a large ice-cooler, was a charger of the best champagne.

George Vane looked round at the preparations, and, still half doubtful, remarked—

“You think she’ll come, then?”

“Think—of course I do. I know she will.”

“And this is not all an elaborate hoax on your part?”

“Well, not exactly; it would be both an unsatisfactory and an expensive one, as I have told them to put supper, wine, and all to my bill. If your ‘golden’ barmaid was only as assured a fact as that this lady will come to-night, I should feel perfectly satisfied.”

“Ah! the black-eyed barmaid. I can’t think where she can be. By Jove! while I think of it, I’ll just step down and ask about her in a careless sort of way.”

“All right, old fellow, I’ll wait out on the balcony till you come back.”

The window looked out on the premises at the back, which ran down to the landing-steps before spoken of.

This particular room was on the first floor of the hotel, and on either side of it were other rooms, principally bed-chambers, all of which had windows opening on to the balcony, which ran all around the building.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, and Rodney, seating himself on the rail, looked forth, and listened to the singing

and shouting of the sailors who were carousing in the public-house next door.

Several times he started, and listened intently, but seemingly without being able to satisfy himself.

"By heavens, I could almost have sworn I knew that voice. Surely it was Billy-go-easy."

Again he listened, but the voice in question was so drowned in the loud chorus, that he could not be certain.

"I've a great mind to go round and satisfy myself," he muttered.

He looked at his watch, and saw that it wanted only a few minutes of twelve.

"No, she will be here directly, and I would not miss the fun for the world. How blank old Geordie will look !"

Having given up the idea of going down, he sat lazily on the rails, whistling and looking out towards the harbour.

As he gazed he saw two figures pass slowly and cautiously through the side gates, and silently make their way across the yard to the rear.

They had to pass out from the shadow, in which they kept as much as possible, into the full light of the moon.

Rodney instantly recognized them as those who had been watching so long in front of the hotel.

They made straight for the landing-steps, which, though in the shade of some out-buildings, Rodney could just make out.

As he looked he saw dark figures moving about, and was aware that there were men there, one or two of whom advanced hastily to meet the new comers.

He saw them confer hastily together for a few moments, and then one of them pointed with his finger, as he thought, to one of the windows on the same floor, but some distance to the left.

Now, the balcony was divided by iron railings, so that there should be no communication between the different rooms opening out of it. Still, it would be easy for any one with the least activity, to clamber from one part to another.

"I wonder what the devil they are pointing at?" said Rodney to himself. "As sure as death, there's something up. Can they intend a burglary—to rob the hotel? No; they would scarcely hang about so openly if that were their object. I've a great mind to go down and reconnoitre a bit."

However, he again remembered that it was close to twelve o'clock, and decided to remain.

He watched them, however, for some minutes, and saw them scatter themselves about the vicinity of the steps; some were sitting down, others flitting restlessly to and fro.

He was aroused from this occupation by the return of George Vane, who called him into the room.

"By Jove! old fellow, she's come back."

"Who has come back?" asked Rodney, having forgotten what his friend went down for.

"Who? why, that black-eyed girl, the golden barmaid. I asked quite casually, and they told me she had just run up into her room. So I don't suppose we shall see anything of her to-night. But we shall to-morrow. I didn't like to ask where she had been. On a visit or something I expect. However, to-morrow will prove to you that I have not been humbugging you. Hallo! there's twelve striking. What about the senorita? she ought to be here soon."

"She's hardly had time to dress herself yet, after the theatre," said Rodney; "she'll be here in less than a quarter of an hour, I'll wager."

"We shall see, we shall see," replied Vane, rather nervously, for he was beginning to be impatient.

Rodney Ray could not help pitying him a little, in view of the tremendous sell there was in store for him.

"He's smitten! hard hit, by Jove! What a sell it will be for him!"

Vane impatiently walked up and down the room, while Rodney rested himself near the open window, and carelessly looked out.

Five minutes—ten minutes—a quarter past twelve!

Rodney looked at his watch, rose, and rang the bell.

"Bring the supper up, waiter," he said ; "covers for three."

"But there's only two," said Vane, sharply ; "she is not come, and I don't believe she will come."

"Nonsense ; sit down, and don't be a fool. I tell you she'll be here."

At that moment the rattle of a carriage, as it dashed up to the door, might have been heard.

Rodney heard it, and a gleam of satisfaction shot across his face.

"There she is," he said to himself. "I knew she would come. I will close the window, it may be too cold for her."

With this intention he went to the window, and his hand was upon it, when his attention was suddenly and irresistibly attracted by the sound of a man's voice pouring forth an old, old song :—

"So let the world jog on as it will,
I'll be free and easy still ;
Free and easy,
Free and easy,
I'll be free and easy still."

Well he remembered the song, and well he knew the deep-toned voice of his first friend—his mentor—Billy-go-easy.

The waiter was in the room.

A host of old recollections and associations brought by that familiar stave for a moment or two, banished everything else from his mind.

Forgotten was the lady expected—forgotten too was the golden barmaid, the supper, and even his friend, George Vane.

"Waiter, you know that public-house next door."

"Yes, sir."

"You hear the sound of singing through the open window ?"

"Yes, sir "

"Here's half-a-crown ; go round at once and bring the man here."

"Who, sir?"

"The sailor who is singing that song."

"Bring him, sir? But how can I? Suppose he won't come?"

"He will come when you tell him who has sent you. Say you come from Rodney Ray—quick—don't stand gaping there."

The man vanished in great astonishment, rather inclined to the opinion that the gentleman who had ordered so sumptuous a supper in the best private room in the hotel was mad.

"Why, what the dence is up, Rodney?" asked Vane.

"You have heard me speak of Billy-go-easy, my old friend. We promised to meet here in Sydney. I suppose he was delayed keeping the appointment to the day; that is he who is singing. He will be here directly; I long to clasp his honest hand."

Rodney was quite flushed and excited, and paced the room as impatiently as had his friend a few minutes previously.

Another waiter entered, bringing the supper dishes on a tray. Having placed them on the table, he went out; and as he did so he met a lady coming up the stairs.

"Mr. Rodney has ordered supper here, which is his room? Show me to it, if you please."

"You are the lady he expected?"

"Yes, yes," the lady said, stamping her little feet impatiently.

"This way, madam."

Wide open he threw the door, and the lady advanced into the room; she paused after taking a few paces, and looked around.

An exceedingly handsome woman of some three-and-twenty summers stood before our two friends, or rather before George Vane, for Rodney was standing by the window listening to the sailor's song, and was half-hidden by the curtains.

She wore a white satin dress, with no other ornament

save a black belt with silver clasp. Neither bonnet nor hat had she, but over her head and shoulders was thrown with inimitable grace, a black veil of rich lace. Her dark hair was bound up behind her head in the classic fashion. Diamond earrings glittered in her ears, and, suspended by a thin gold chain, a small diamond cross hung round her neck which was white and polished as alabaster.

Her dress fitted her exquisitely, and set off her exquisite figure to the best advantage. Swelling upwards from the slender waist to the fine sloping shoulders, whereon, gracefully placed, was the small, beautiful head, and downwards to the hips, the drapery, not distended by hideous crinoline, fell gracefully, just showing the elegant shape of her lower limbs.

Like a beautiful statue she stood for a few moments, her cheeks flushed, eyes gleaming, lips parted, and bosom heaving with emotion.

As her glance fell upon George Vane, he trembled, and felt as though her eager glance turned him.

Then she looked away, and slowly swept the room until her eye rested on Rodney Ray, who advanced, calm, confident, and smiling.

If he anticipated a quiet, conventional meeting, he was greatly mistaken. Claspng her hands for a moment, she swept his person from head to foot.

"Rodney!"

That was all she said, and then, with a cry of joy, she rushed forward and threw herself into his arms.

It was Cora Nina, as doubtless the reader will have guessed.

It was plain, too, that whatever might be the feelings of our hero towards her, hers were of deep and unalterable affection towards him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE TWO RIVAL BEAUTIES.

GEORGE VANE looked on aghast, stricken dumb with surprise. Indignation, astonishment, dismay, all had place in his heart as he saw her throw herself into Rodney's arms. He was too much dumb-founded to speak, however, and stood stupidly staring at the singular tableau.

At last a phrase expressive of astonishment broke from him. It was very brief, and not by any means polite or correct.

The words seemed to waken the lady to a sense of the fact that there was another person in the room besides herself and her long-lost lover.

She started away a little from Rodney, and, blushing deeply, looked on Georgie Vane—

"Ah," she faltered, "the gentleman who threw me a bouquet the other night!"

"Yes, Cora ; and a very old friend of mine."

Rodney took her by the hand, and led her towards his friend.

"Geordie, my boy," he said, "allow me to introduce you to the Signorita Cora Nina, about whom I have spoken to you. This is the lady who played some part in my Havannah adventure."

George Vane could not recover all at once from his surprise, nor did he look by any means well pleased.

"Poor fellow," thought Rodney, "he's hard hit! I didn't think he was so desperately in love."

Vane certainly cut a very poor figure, and he knew it. However, he had really no cause for quarrel ; Rodney was an old acquaintance—an old lover of the lady even—and thus, though he felt himself cut out, and in a measure humiliated, he tried to put the best possible face on the matter, and laugh it off.

He took the proffered hand, and said, with as much indifference and carelessness as he could command—

“Madam, I am, believe me, most proud to make your acquaintance.”

“Geordie, old boy,” cried Rodney, “it was too bad of me, but ’pon my soul, I couldn’t help it !”

“All right, old fellow, I’ll be even with you yet ; I’ll punish you somehow, depend upon it. I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he said, maliciously. “I’ll cut you out with the golden barmaid.”

This thrust told, inasmuch as it made the lady jealous.

“The golden barmaid—who is she ?” asked Cora Nina, in the prettiest possible foreign accent.

“Oh, don’t mind his nonsense !” said Rodney.

Nevertheless, she was evidently piqued, and tossed her pretty head, and pouted her lips, in a manner which told she was not so indifferent as she pretended to be.

“Come, let us to supper,” cried Rodney, gallantly conducting her to a seat next the head of the table.

Volatile, versatile, ever dwelling on the present, too thoughtless both of the past and the future, Rodney had now absolutely forgotten that he had despatched the waiter to bring to him Billy-go-easy, whose voice he had heard and recognized.

Just as he seated himself, the door was again thrown open, and the waiter, with a broad grin, announced Mr. William-go-easy and Mr. Robert-the-Blazer.

Enter our two friends, much the same as when we last saw them, except, perhaps, that time had streaked the old sailors’ hair with a little more gray, and had caused the gigantic frame of the Blazer to thicken out, till he now looked like a very Hercules.

Mademoiselle Cora Nina stared at the apparition of the two rough-looking sailors, and half rose from her seat in alarm, but Rodney quieted her.

“These are old friends of mine, whom, like you, have not seen for a long while. I know you will pard my asking them to join us.”

The lady smiled her assent, and Rodney ran to welcome the two salts.

"Billy, my boy, I'm delighted to see you. Do you know I thought that by your not keeping your appointment you were far away, at the other side of the globe?"

"No, lad," replied the old sailor; "I've been cruisin' about these latitudes this many a month. My last trip was from Hobart Town, but a northerly snorter kep' us back, and place o' bein' four or five days we've bin a fortnight; Bob here and me fully meant to come to time, but you know we can't allus fight ag'in wind and weather."

"Bob, old friend, how are you?" cried Rodney, shaking hands in turn with the other, who favoured him with a grip like that of a blacksmith's vice.

"Hearty, thankee, hearty. Splinter me, youngster, but you've filled out into a strapping young fellow! I allus liked you, and said as your heart was in the right place—didn't I, Billy?"

"You did so, lad; and so did I. From the first day I set eyes on you I knew as there was stuff in you."

"Well, well, let's sit down, and we'll all have some supper. Here, waiter! bring some plates, knives, and glasses, and see that there's plenty to eat. Sit down, lads. This is my friend, an old schoolfellow, and now a sailor of fortune; and this," bowing to the lady, "is another friend of mine, who will, I am sure, be glad of your company."

"I am very glad to see your friends; Mr. Billy-go-easy, I have often heard of you—pray be seated."

Gracefully she rose, and with a charming smile motioned for the two sailors to take their seats on the same side of the table as herself.

Not without a little awkwardness Billy and Big Bob shuffled round, hats in hand. They had not been accustomed to the society of ladies, and the vision of beauty and grace before them almost dazzled them.

Meanwhile Rodney went to the door to call the waiter, whom he heard clattering with some plates on the landing.

Having given his order he returned to the room, and was about walking to the head of the table, when he heard the rustle of a silk dress.

He stopped, turned round, and beheld a female figure—another lady—advancing towards him.

He was standing in full light, while she was in shade, so that while she had a good view of his face and form, he had but an imperfect one of hers.

He saw, however, that it was a young and handsome girl, with a profusion of rich raven-black curls.

“Rodney!”

He started violently, and then changed colour.

Cora Nina rose, and looked angrily towards the door, where she knew, though she could not see, that there stood a woman—possibly a rival.

George Vane, too, rose from the seat he had just taken, also in surprise, for he recognized the lady.

“Rodney, is it indeed you? After four years, during which I have thought of you unceasingly by day, dreamed of you by night, I again see you!”

“Leah!” he faltered.

She advanced a step, then paused, trembling, and careless of all but him, threw herself into his arms.

Imagine the anger and amazement of Cora Nina, and the utter bewilderment of Geordie Vane!

“What! does he know the other one, my golden barmaid?” the latter said to himself.

Meanwhile, Rodney was in an embarrassing though charming situation. The girl, no other than Leah Jacobs, clung round his neck, and did not scruple to bestow sweet kisses upon him.

She was very handsome, her figure, her face, her eyes, hair, everything about her. Hers was that dark, voluptuous style of beauty seldom seen except in Jewish or Eastern women.

She seemed to have absolutely forgotten everything, except the fact that she had again the inexpressible happiness of seeing her first love.

Rodney was the first to recover his self-possession.

Gently disengaging her arms from around his neck, he said—

“Leah, pray consider we are not alone.”

“Ah!” she said, flashing her great black eyes around on the company, “I had forgotten—forgotten everything, but that I have again found you.”

First she saw and recognized George Vane.

“Ah!” she said, smiling, “I have seen this gentleman—I know him.”

Thereupon she shook hands with him.

“And don’t ’ee know me, miss?” asked Billy-go-easy.

“An’ me, my buck-eyed beauty?” put in Bob-the-Blazer.

“Of course I do—both of you—on board the ——”

“Ah, but you wasn’t a fine young lady then like you are now! Lor’ bless my soul, who’d a thought o’ ever seeing little Billy Taylor, the cabin boy, a toggged out like this here?”

Leah blushed, and looked surprised and a little annoyed, for she saw that the other lady, Cora Nina, was intently regarding her and listening.

“Stash it,” said Bob, to his mate. “Glad to see you lookin’ well and hearty, miss. I ain’t one to forget, and I remember how, aboard that ship, when I was hurt in the scrimmage of some of them mutineers, you bound up my wounds, and tended me like an angel. I knowed who you was and what you was, though I’d better manners than to blurt it out.”

These words he accompanied with a shrug of the shoulders, and a reproachful glance towards Billy-go-easy.

Though Rodney had gently disengaged Leah from the close embrace in which she held him, he still suffered her to retain his hand.

She glanced from George Vane to the two sailors, from them to Rodney, then to the lady seated near the head of the table, and then back again to Rodney.

Cora Nina met her glance boldly, defiantly.

It was easy to see that there was war between the two girls.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A SELECT SUPPER PARTY.

HOWEVER awkward and embarrassing the situation, Rodney resolved to make the best of it.

"Come, let us go to supper," he said. "Waiter, another cover. We are all friends, and we will have a right merry night of it."

He strove to speak lightly, carelessly, but it was not altogether with a good grace.

"A cover, did you say, sir, for—for—Miss Kate?"

"Miss Kate!" he asked, in surprise.

"I am known as Miss Kate here, dear Rodney," Leah said.

"Oh, I see." Then to the waiter—"Yes, certainly, this young lady is an old friend. She will sup with us. Come, be off; don't stand there staring."

In good truth the waiter had reason to stare in astonishment.

He might well doubt the sanity of Mr. Rodney, who first invited a grand lady from the theatre, next, two rough sailors from the grog-shop next door, and finally insisted on his bringing another cover for the barmaid.

However, he vanished without further disputing the order of our hero, who spoke imperiously, and as if he meant what he said.

The seat on the right at the head of the table was occupied by Cora Nina.

Rodney could do no other than lead Leah to the one on his left hand.

George Vane seated himself next the actress, while Billy-go-easy and Black-ball-Bob were on the same side of the table as Leah.

The two girls sat facing, not exactly glancing defiantly,

but regarding each other with furtive glances full of jealous mistrust.

The predicament would have been eminently ridiculous, had it not been for its awkwardness ; which Rodney could not but feel.

In this case the biter was indeed bit. He had planned a malicious plot against George Vane, and now, though, as he expected, the latter had been astonished and dismayed, he himself, by the sudden and totally unexpected appearance of Leah, had been still more completely discomfited and taken aback.

However, there they were, face to face, one on the right hand, one on the left, and it behoved him to make the best of it.

"Cora," he said, forcing a smile, "this is a night of surprises. First my friend here is surprised that we should be acquainted, then I am surprised at discovering my two old shipmates are at hand, lastly I am surprised at meeting in this young lady on my left an old friend."

"Not disagreeably surprised, I hope?" said Leah, sharply.

"By no means. I am delighted. I long to hear your story. You know under what terrible circumstances we parted."

"Ah!" said Leah, "I have much to tell you, but I must reserve my story until we are alone."

She meant no offence by the words, nor, perhaps, would any have been taken, but unfortunately, she glanced as she spoke towards Mademoiselle Cora Nina. Their eyes met, Cora's flashed angrily, and her cheek flushed.

The waiter entered at this moment, and placing a plate for Miss Leah, whispered to Rodney that the landlord wished to speak to him.

Leah caught the words and at once concluded that it was on her account. Certainly it was rather a strange proceeding for the barmaid at an hotel to take her seat at supper with one of the visitors and his party.

Leah rose.

"I had better go," she said.

"Nonsense, Leah ; sit still. I will be back directly."

Cora Nina also rose.

"I think I will go back to my hotel," she said. "I would not intrude for worlds. I see that you and this young lady wish to have some private conversation."

"Do not disturb yourself on my account, pray," said Leah.

"I concern myself on account of my friend Mr. Rodney," said the actress, with peculiar emphasis.

"And I would not put my old and very dear friend Rodney to any inconvenience whatever," replied the pretty Jewess, with still greater emphasis.

Cora Nina turned white with jealousy, and her lip quivered as she replied, addressing our hero, and turning her face away from Leah—

"I would rather go home. I do not feel inclined for company to-night."

To this there could be no reply. Rodney looked blank, and faltered out some few words, scarce knowing what he said.

"Will you be kind enough to order my carriage?"

Rodney rang the bell, and ordered the lady's carriage to be brought round.

Meanwhile all stood up. A more awkward and embarrassed party it would be difficult to meet with.

The obvious antagonism of the two girls had thrown a wet blanket over all.

In good truth, the Jewess, Leah Jacobs, was gloriously handsome.

She was taller, more commandingly and grandly handsome, than even the fascinating Cora.

She took opportunity while George Vane was addressing a few words to her rival, to speak to Rodney.

"I had better not remain now. I will speak to you presently."

"Why not to-morrow, Leah?" said Rodney, more for the sake of saying something than aught else. "Let us be merry to-night."

"No, to-night. I cannot, dare not, will not wait till to-morrow. Thank heaven I have seen you! I knew, I felt sure I should. I have not preserved in vain the tremendous secret I am the depository of."

"Secret, Leah?"

"It is a secret I have preserved at the peril of my liberty—my life. A secret, the possession of which even now imperils me. A secret which causes me to be watched night and day. I am watched now. I saw some of the ruffians this very afternoon. I dare not stir abroad."

"But what is the nature of this tremendous secret?" asked Rodney.

"Rodney, I will tell you all by-and-by. At present let this suffice. I know where there is a valley the very stones of which are gold! A gold quarry—an immense mine of treasure!"

Rodney, though he half expected what the nature of the secret was from what his friend had told him, could at first scarce persuade himself that he heard the girl aright, and that she was serious.

He gazed hard in her face, but saw there only solemn earnestness and firm resolve.

"To-night I will tell you all. To-morrow, or when you will, I will conduct you to this golden valley. That is, if you are still true to me in heart, as I am to you."

This proviso was a little embarrassing. To tell the truth our volatile hero had never given the subject a thought.

He looked on the Jewish maiden.

She was very beautiful.

She loved him!

He owed her a debt of gratitude.

For him she had deserted her home and her father.

She had given him strong proofs of her devotion.

Here was a dilemma indeed.

On either side a lovely woman, and each one insisting that he should resign the other.

Rodney was torn by conflicting emotions. He had known Leah first; she had sacrificed much for him.

But he had known her as a girl—a mere child.

He had known Cora Nina as a man, and she had loved him, did still love him.

Then she was so beautiful!

His eye fell on Leah.

So was she ; gloriously handsome.

And she also loved him.

Thus he stood between these two rival beauties, for full half a minute.

Cora was the first to speak.

“Come, sir,” she said, as she drew the lace around her which served as veil and shawl, “I await your answer and your hand to conduct me to my carriage.”

Rodney grew red and pale by turns.

“If you fail me now, if you desert me, I will kill myself this very night, and the secret of the golden valley shall die with me.”

These were the words Leah whispered, in a voice audible only to himself.

Cora Nina saw her whisper something, but could not catch the words.

The colour forsook her cheek, and an angry glitter came to her eye.

“Beware how you scorn me ; beware, I say, Rodney !”

She stamped her small foot angrily as she spoke. In this she acted injudiciously.

Her voice, her manner, her features, were threatening, and Rodney’s spirit rose in arms.

Then he glanced on the Jewish maiden, and he thought her lovelier than Cora.

He remembered, too, the golden valley, and that decided him.

“Mademoiselle,” he said, with studied politeness, “I have invited you and other friends to supper ; I shall be proud and happy of your company.”

“I cannot stay—will not stay to-night. I have much to say to you. Excuse yourself, then, to your friends for a brief space.”

"No," he said, decisively, "I shall not do so. To-morrow I am at your service."

She turned white as Parian marble, her eyes blazed, however, like stars; her voice was husky and tremulous as she turned and addressed George Vane.

"Will you be kind enough to see me to my carriage?"

"With pleasure."

She took his arm, and with a haughty bow swept out of the room.

Leah had conquered.

Or was it the golden valley?

CHAPTER XL.

"GREAT EXPECTATIONS."

THOUGH he scarcely acknowledged it to himself, Rodney's mind was secretly swayed by the thought of the tremendous secret the Jewess possessed.

Right well he knew that she spoke the truth. She was incapable of falsehood.

Besides, there were other facts corroborative of what she said, had he been inclined to doubt.

She was dogged, watched, and followed by men, whose object was to seize a favourable opportunity to kidnap her and force from her, perhaps by torture, the secret which they knew she possessed.

A quarry of gold!

The words seemed to ring in his ears. Visions of a great pit of glistening gold—piles on piles of the glistening yellow metal—floated before his eyes.

"Rodney, my own—my only love, I knew you would be true to me!"

Her voice trembled and thrilled like the music of a harp, and when George Vane and Cora Nina had gone, she took his hand, and lifting it to her lips, passionately kissed it.

"The landlord!" said Rodney, suddenly remembering that he desired to speak to him, as he heard him speaking below. "Remain here, I will go and explain to him."

So Rodney hurried away; and while he was making things right with the proprietor of the hotel, which he did without any great difficulty, Billy-go-easy and Black-ball Bob rose from their seats.

"Well, miss," said the latter, "I reckon we'll leave you to yourselves, and good luck to you; I'm glad you beat that furrin play-actin' gal out o' the field. Not as she ain't a clinker—clipper built, and copper bottom, A 1, no mistake—but because you and he are old friends. Here's luck to you, wherever you go. You'll find him a trifle wildish, and maybe a bit fickle at times; but his heart's in the right place; and he's a man, every inch of him. What say you, Billy?"

"Right you are, Bob; an' here's his jolly good health. As fine a fellow, and as smart a sailor, as ever trod a plank. We'll drink his health in a bottle o' this wine first, and then go round next door and drink yours in rum, miss—cuss me, if I wasn't a-goin' to say Billy Taylor—Miss Leah Jacobs, I mean."

"But you are not going, surely; do stop. Remember, Billy, that if it hadn't been for you I should never have seen Rodney."

"No, no, we're off," said Big Bob, as he knocked the neck off a bottle of sherry, and poured the contents into a pint tankard. "Here's luck to him, and success to him, and wishing him joy of the handsomest gal in Sydney—and that's you, young 'oman, and no mistake."

Bob drained off a good half of the tankard, handed it to Billy-go-easy, and then the pair took their departure, leaving Leah half crying with joy at the happy events of the night.

She had triumphed, and won her love.

Rodney met the two sailors on the stairs, and vainly tried to persuade them to stop.

"No, no, my hearty ; we ain't such sawnies as to spoil sport. You and the gal want to have a long yarn together. Make up for lost time, and good luck to you."

"Well, then, at least, you'll drink our healths, both of you. How are you off for coin ?"

"Not a shot in the locker, old shipmate."

"Here, take these two sovereigns, and drink our healths for the sake of 'auld lang syne.'"

"Ay, that we will—and if we don't wake up that old shanty next door, my name ain't Billy-go-easy."

"Mind, you'll come round in the morning. I've something I want to see you about, both of you. You haven't shipped, either of you, have you ?"

"No ; but we'll have to 'fore long, I reckon."

"No. I'm going up the country, gold-hunting. You shall come with me, both of you."

"There's a power o' difference between gold-hunting and gold-finding," said Billy-go-easy, drily.

"Right you are, Billy ; but, as it happens, when I start I shall know where to hunt, and so be sure of finding the gold."

Rodney returned to the room where he had left Leah—smiling, tearful, brimming over with love and joy.

He had explained to the landlord that the young lady was his cousin, whom he had not seen for years, and of whom, now he had found her, he intended to take care, and not allow longer to be barmaid at an hotel, even, as he flatteringly added, at the best in Sydney, the "Prince of Wales." From that night, he said, the young lady was to be a guest at the hotel, and her bill put down to his account. Incidentally he let drop that he had plenty of money, and as he would pass a good deal of his time in Sydney, would be a frequent visitor. Hitherto he had paid liberally, and so there was no difficulty in arranging this little matter.

Rodney was about removing the covers to commence supper, but Leah stopped him.

"Will you not wait for your friend?" she asked. "He has only gone to see that lady to her carriage."

"Ah, yes—well, I'll wait five minutes. Come, let us talk."

"With all my heart, but you must not question me yet. I will not talk about myself, or my adventures, or my discovery of the golden valley, or of anything but the present. Before we go any farther I have a question to ask you."

"Ask away, Leah."

"Who is that lady—she with the black lace veil, worn in foreign fashion? I know that you have met before, and that she is in love with you; for a while I feared that you too loved her; now, dearest, I know otherwise, and am happy."

A gentle pressure of his hand in hers assured him of the fact, and he proceeded to answer as best he could.

"That, Leah, is a lady whom I met under curious circumstances in Havannah. I was a wounded, hunted, proscribed outcast, and if caught it would have gone hard with me. I threw myself on her protection, on her mercy. It was not refused to me; she took me in, sheltered me, fed me, clothed me, cured my wounds, nursed me through the accompanying fever; so, you see, Leah, I had every reason to be grateful; I was grateful, and when I knew she was in Sydney, I at once asked her to supper with myself and my friend."

"And now, what of yourself, Leah?" he said, anxious to change the conversation from this channel.

"Of myself, nothing until after supper—I will talk of nothing except of the present. I will not spoil present happiness."

"Well, then, of the present, Leah. I gather from you that you are in perpetual fear of being kidnapped, or something of the sort."

"Ah! there you are wrong."

"How so? I certainly understood you were watched, and in constant terror."

"I was, but am so no longer."

"Then the danger is over?"

"Yes; I do not fear now, because I have you near by to protect me."

"But what of these men who you imagine are constantly watching you?"

"It is not imagination, but terrible fact. I saw some of them to-day."

"Where?"

"In front of the hotel."

"They came the day before yesterday in the Melbourne boat. Despite all my efforts to elude them, and escape from the surveillance of this band of desperadoes, they have found me out; and now, but for you, I should be in constant dread of my liberty, of my life."

"You speak of a band. What band is it?"

"An organized band of ruffians, who are by turns bush-rangers, horse thieves, and diggers, gamblers, anything in fact."

"And have they any organized leader?" asked Rodney.

"Yes; and he it was who traced me here where I thought myself secure."

"Who is he?"

"You have known him."

"Ah! what one of the mutineers?"

"Yes; the villainous ringleader of the mutineers, Yellow Dick. But here comes your friend. Don't let us talk any more till after supper."

George Vane reappeared, looking, however, by no means happy.

Rodney at once divined that, though Mademoiselle Cora Nina had from pique and wounded pride asked his escort home, she had not been in a very amiable mood, or treated him with any particular favour. In this he was not mistaken, for no sooner had he taken his seat by her side in the carriage at her request, than she could no longer restrain her feelings, but burst forth into a passion of tears.

Of course this was most mortifying and unpleasant to her

companion, who, himself in love with her, knew that she was weeping from jealousy of Rodney.

"Come, old fellow, we've been waiting supper for you."

"You need not have done so, I have no appetite."

"Now don't be ill-tempered. I apologise humbly for disbelieving your story of the golden barmaid. I should be a sceptic indeed did I doubt you now, with the young lady by my side."

"What do you mean by the golden barmaid?" Leah asked, smiling.

"That impertinent fellow, who has already I believe scraped acquaintance with you, dares thus to designate you."

Leah was full of spirits and good humour, and gradually George Vane's ill-temper melted before her smiles.

"Come," she said, "let us to supper. You, Mr. Vane, will sit opposite to me."

Vane obeyed the orders and resumed—when all at once, through the open window, the sound of a roaring chorus came pouring in.

"Oh! good friends, do shut the window and the shutters too," the young lady said. "What a tremendous noise!"

"Don't you recognize the voice? That is Billy-go-easy, for the ten thousandth time, I daresay, favouring the worshipful company with his only song—"

"Free and easy,
Free and easy,
I'll be free and easy still.'"

A right down thundering chorus it was, and, though there were not more than a dozen singers at the outside, they made noise enough for a hundred.

"They'll keep it up for an hour or two, I'll be bound. It will take that time, I'll warrant, for them to spend the two sovereigns I gave them."

"Ah! you gave them two sovereigns, Rodney? and I thought it was on my account they would not stop to supper—never to give anything to drink our healths with. I will send them five this moment by the waiter."

"Nonsense, Leah, what extravagance!"

"Extravagance? what do you mean, sir? I have money: and, besides, am I not the 'golden barmaid'?"

Leah insisted, and so, perforce, Rodney had to accept the office of taking her gift round to the carousing sailors.

As things turned out it was a stroke of fortune that he did so.

When he got down to the bar he found that it was past one o'clock, and the front of the house was closed. The landlord, however, civilly informed him that he could go out through the back, and make his way to the public-house where the sailors were by the side entrance.

As Rodney passed out into the yard, and was crossing towards the said side door, the situation of which the waiter who let him out had pointed out to him, he saw three figures standing about sixty yards off, and in the full light of the moon. Something in the face of one of them struck him, and impelled him to get a better view if possible. With this object he walked along in the shade of the outbuildings, noiselessly and silently, till he was within twenty yards. Unfortunately the ground was loose gravel, and he could not approach nearer without being heard. However, from where he was he could see enough of the figure and features of one of the men to be almost certain that he saw Yellow Dick, the ringleader of the mutiny.

Whilst he stood debating what was best to be done, the two men moved slowly off towards the landing-steps. Then he noticed that there were at least a dozen other men lounging about.

Yellow Dick, for he was certain it was he, stopped, and pointed up to the hotel. Rodney had slowly followed, and managed to get within hearing distance, and caught a few words.

"It's all right—the game is watched down—fourth window—take the small boat a couple of you—let them know on board the schooner—an hour before daylight—every man—land—in case—of—"

That was all he could catch. However, he stood still, and watched and listened.

There were two boats lying close together at the steps. Nearer to him there were several other boats, but these were either hauled up or padlocked. Two men entered the smaller of these boats, and commenced rowing out into the harbour.

"Wonder where they're bound to?" Rodney thought to himself. "I'll wait and see."

He did so, and watched the boat shoot out into the moonlight, and, briskly propelled by the two oarsmen, row up alongside a small schooner, lying about three quarters of a mile out in the harbour.

Beyond the fact of his recognizing Yellow Diek he had no reason to attribute any evil designs to the group of men gathered on the landing-steps and in the large boat. There was, however, something so quiet and stealthy in their movements, coupled with the fact of their speaking in low mutterings, and the connection he more than suspected between them and the men who had been watching the front of the hotel, that he felt firmly convinced that some villainous work was on hand.

What it was he could not say, but thought it not unlikely the girl's fears were not unfounded, and that they meant carrying her off.

This he resolved, however, should not be. He would elicit from her fuller particulars as to the nature of their supposed plans, and would himself keep a bright look-out over her safety.

Thinking thus, he made his way back, and without difficulty finding the side-door to the grog-shop, entered, and, guided by the uproar these social sons of the ocean made, walked into a room where they were assembled.

He was not in a humour to remain long, even if Leah and supper had not been awaiting him; so, after handing the five sovereigns to Billy-go-easy, and waiting while they drank his health, with three-times-three, he wished them all good night. Suddenly, however, it occurred to him it would be as well to know where Billy and Big Bob boarded, as he might require their assistance at any time.

"Bob and me, and eight more of us, all boards here. Any time you want us, Mister Rodney" (insensibly Billy now mistered him), "we're at your service for fun, frolic, or fighting—anything you like."

As he rejoined them in the supper-room a church clock chimed the half-hour past one.

"A pretty time to begin supper, sir!" Leah said, playfully. "Where have you been, sir, all this time?"

"I was detained by those fellows. They would insist on my drinking with them, and then waiting while my health was given with musical honours and three-times-three."

And thereupon they fell to their supper, and, forgetting all troubles and annoyances, made the best of the time present, and enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

George Vane, who never sulked long together, recovered his good-humour. As for Leah, she was in high spirits, as also was, or, at all events, appeared to be, Rodney.

Two o'clock struck—three o'clock—and then George Vane declared he must go to bed. He had an idea that his friend and the golden barmaid wished for a little private conversation. In this he was not mistaken.

"Look here, old fellow, I'll come up to your room presently. I want to have a few words with you."

"All right—don't be long. I'm as sleepy as an owl."

"I won't. I am going to elicit from this young lady the secret of the golden valley, lest she should change her mind in the morning."

"Indeed you won't to-night, I can assure you," she replied, gravely. "The subject is a painful one, and I always tremble and feel inclined to cry when I think of it. Besides, I am tired."

"I was only joking, Leah."

"Well, good night, Miss Leah. As for you, you incorrigible scamp, I believe you would sleep sound if the town was on fire, so long as you were safe."

"Now, Leah, don't be alarmed at what I am about to say, but answer me seriously what I ask."

"I will do so," she replied at once.

"I want you to tell me what you suspect these men design, of whom you are afraid. Just now, when I went out, I saw some very suspicious characters lurking about down by the water, and among them one whom I could almost swear was Yellow Dick."

"Oh, I am all safe now," she said, cheerfully. "I take especial care to bolt, bar, and barricade my door. It is in the day-time I am in danger. They hope to catch me out, and once, indeed, I was decoyed nearly to the top of Pitt Street, I believe for that very purpose."

"What do you then imagine they intend?"

"To kidnap me, and carry me off into the bush, as they did before, and then wring from me by torture the secret which none but you, dear Rodney, shall ever know. But I will not talk about the past to-night. Let it suffice that I know where this valley, or rather gully is, and can find it—not without trouble, perhaps—but I can certainly find it. To-morrow, if I feel well enough, or another time if not, I will relate everything to you."

"So be it, then. And now, Leah, you wish to go to bed, for you must indeed be tired."

She rose, and he, conducting her to the door, got a candle, and gave it to her.

"Good night, dear Rodney."

Frankly she held up her tearful face to be kissed by him.

"You are not afraid of any attempt to-night?"

"Afraid—no indeed! Yonder is my room—the fourth from this. I told you I barricaded the door well—and now good night."

"Good night."

Rodney went first up to George Vane's room, according to promise.

"I have come to apologise, old fellow. I am afraid you are annoyed at my foolish practical joke with respect to Cora Nina. But you chaffed me, you know, and I could not resist the temptation of taking a rise out of you."

"All right, Rodney, it's all over now. I'll own I was awfully savage at first. I believe, however, I began to come

round when I saw what a devil of a fix you were in by the arrival of the other girl. By Jove ! it was better than a play ! I never saw such a splendid stage situation in my life. What a tableau ! I fancy I see you standing between the two girls—ha ! ha ! Oh, it was capital ! ”

“ I say, though, old fellow, it’s all true about the golden valley.”

“ Of course it is—didn’t I tell you so before ? ”

“ And she’s really in fear of being kidnapped by some ruffians who know that she has the secret.”

“ The devil she is—you don’t meant it ? ” said Vane, satirically. “ Why, I told you so before, didn’t I ? ”

“ Yes—but I did not pay any attention to it. Now I do ; and I am also of opinion that there is danger—immediate danger.”

“ What, not now ? ”

“ Yes, now—at any time. There’s a troop of fellows hanging about, and I tell you, from their looks and some words they let drop, I don’t half like it. I shall sit up all night. We can’t afford to lose our pretty Leah now.”

“ That’s good—that’s capital,” said Vane, laughing again, as he tumbled into bed. “ What a fond, devoted lover !—‘ We can’t afford to lose our pretty Leah just now.’ She’s too valuable, eh, this golden barmaid ? Oh, disinterested love ! ”

“ Don’t play the fool, Geordie. I shan’t talk to you any more. Seriously, though, in case anything occurs, just be ready. Have you got your pistol handy ? ”

“ Always sleep with it under my pillow, my boy, in this tranquil country.”

“ All right—good night.”

Rodney returned to the room where they had supped. As he passed Leah’s room, however, he knocked, and after a moment she answered—

“ Who’s there ? ”

“ It’s I, Leah. Good night.”

“ Good night.”

He seated himself in an easy chair by the table, drew up

another for his feet, lit a cigar, brewed a tumbler of grog, and commenced to enjoy himself in a quiet sort of way.

The last few days had been eventful enough to afford him plenty of food, for the unlooked-for appearance of his former lover-friend Leah on the scene, after he had lost sight of her nearly four years, had been a great surprise, and no little shock. He had looked upon her as dead, and had often reproached himself for his past ingratitude and carelessness in forgetting her, and leaving her on board the vessel, in the hands of those desperate ruffians, the mutineers. And now, to his utter astonishment, she turned up, in the most extraordinary manner, no longer a pretty girl merely, but an exceedingly handsome woman.

By-and-by his thoughts flew homewards, and he remembered his father, and also his first friend—his girl-sweetheart, Lucy Maitland; her sweet image rose before his mind's eye. In fancy he again beheld her soft eyes beaming on him, and felt the sweet influence of her sunny smile.

Presently his waking reverie merged into dreams, and he fell fast asleep.

* * * * *

How long he slept he knew not, but awoke with a start.

Confused and dizzy, he knew not at first what had aroused him thus suddenly.

He looked around the room, everything was as before.

The door was closed, and there was nothing to lead him to believe that any one had entered.

And yet he felt certain that some loud and startling noise had suddenly called him from dreamland. Slowly he acquired a knowledge of what it was.

He had heard a scream, a loud, piercing scream.

Next came the conviction that it was Leah who had screamed.

He started up, and taking a candle from the sideboard, lighted it, and proceeded out on to the landing, in the direction of her room. As he did so George Vane's room opened, and he saw his friend in his trousers and shirt.

"What was that noise, Rodney?"

"I scarcely know, I was asleep ; but I feel sure that I heard a shrill scream, which awakened me."

"And so did I. It was a woman's scream."

"It was Leah's voice. Each moment my recollection grows clearer. I will knock at her door."

"Leah ! Leah !"

No answer.

"She's asleep."

Rodney knocked harder.

Still no answer.

Then he tried the door, which to his surprise was not locked, but yielded some few inches.

Not sufficiently, however, for him to be able to see into the room. Some heavy articles of furniture had obviously been dragged against it. However, he shortly became aware of the facts, first, that Leah could not be in the room, secondly, that the window was open. He knew this latter was the case by the stormy wind which almost blew the candle out.

"By heavens !" he cried, excitedly, "she's been carried off—kidnapped—follow me !"

Meanwhile the household was aroused, and all was confusion and dismay.

A brief examination showed how the abduction had been effected. The windows opening on to the balcony were all large, and the sills low. A pane of glass had been skilfully removed. The window had been promptly entered, and the girl seized and silenced ere she could utter more than one shriek.

Probably she had been gagged, at all events, effectually silenced, for Rodney was not the only one who had heard her cry, and all concurred that there was but one.

Looking closer, it became apparent that the abductors had climbed the balcony, for there were marks of feet on the rail, and the ground was much trampled below, as though by a great number.

"By Jupiter ! I'll kill some one for this night's work !"

Then he shouted—

“Geordie, my boy, follow me ! Get me my pistol, it is on the table. I will rouse up Billy-go-easy, Big Bob, and the sailors. If we are quick, we may rescue her, and, what is more, avenge her.”

Lights now gleamed from many windows. The landlord, the waiters, and all the servants, male and female, were awake and rushing about, as is usual in such cases, in a state of helpless confusion and panic.

Meanwhile, Rodney Ray was thundering at the side door of the public-house and shouting at the top of his voice.

“Billy-go-easy ! Bob ! Rouse out, all you fellows ! Open the door ! Quick ! It’s a matter of life and death !”

Though the jovial sailors had been indulging pretty freely in their cups, the noise our hero made aroused them, and in a few moments the door was opened, and they came pouring out.

“Lads,” Rodney said, “you are all English and American sailors, men and not cowardly hounds. A gross outrage has just been committed. A young girl has been violently torn from her bed and carried off by a set of ruffians. I have a good notion whither they have gone ; I ask your assistance to rescue her. Who will follow me ?”

“I will, for one,” cried Big Bob, seizing an iron bar used for fastening the door.

“And I for another,” cried Billy-go-easy.

“When I tell you, Billy, and you, Bob, that the infernal scoundrel who led the mutiny is mixed up with it you will be none the less willing to act with me.”

“Curse his black heart ! if he comes in my reach it’ll go hard with him !” cried the gigantic sailor, as he spoke swinging the iron bar round his head till the air whistled again.

At this moment George Vane joined the party, and handed Rodney his revolver.

“Follow me, lads, this way.”

He led the road to the steps where he had seen the large boat a few hours previously.

As he expected, it was gone. Looking out over the har-

bour he discerned a black object at a distance of about half a mile, and had no difficulty in deciding that it was the boat in question.

"See yonder—there goes the boat, the girl is on board ; we must rescue her ere they put to sea in the schooner."

It was obvious enough that the boat was being rowed rapidly towards the small vessel to which he had watched the lesser boat go earlier in the evening.

They had gained possession of the girl, and probably meant to take her on board, and then put to sea, so as to be clear of all pursuit.

There were two boats, one moored alongside the steps, the other hauled up high and dry ; the first fastened by a padlock, which, however, was in a few minutes wrenched off.

"What about the water-police ?" said one of the sailors. "Their big boat is not half a mile from here, and there are always two men on watch. In half an hour we might have their assistance."

"Half an hour will be too late. Hark !"

Over the waters at Sydney Cove there came a monotonous sound—clank—clank—clank.

It was the noise of the windlass-hauls, and evinced that the crew of the schooner were heaving up the anchor.

"Geordie, you take command of our boat with Billy-go-easy. Big Bob and I will take the other. Now lads, are you all ready ?"

"All ready !"

"Arm yourselves with whatever you can find about. You've all got sheathed knives—excellent for a close tussle ; but we shall want something for knock-down blows."

Search was made, and fortunately a wood pile found, from which each man armed himself with a heavy club.

George Vane and Rodney had each revolvers, while Big Bob had the iron bar he had taken from the public-house.

There were thirteen sailors, which, with our hero and his friend, made up fifteen in all.

A very respectable boarding-party, and one not to be

despised, considering that all, without exception, were strong and determined men.

"Now, lads, eight in one boat and seven in the other—muffle the oars."

Big Bob proceeded to divest himself of his flannel shirt, which he tore up in strips, and handed round for the purpose of muffling the oars.

All the time the sound of the windlass as it worked on board the schooner, dragging up the chain-cable, could be plainly heard.

Rodney Ray seated himself in the stern-sheets, and the boat was shoved off.

"Now, lads, give way—quietly—let not a word be spoken. We will make for the starboard gangway. You, Geordie Vane, go round with your boat to the port side, and board as nearly as possible at the same time."

In a few moments both boats—Rodney's leading—were stealing quietly over the placid waters towards the schooner.

Fortune favoured them, for some heavy clouds obscured the moon, and gave a better chance of approaching the vessel unperceived.

It was fortunate that the crew of the schooner were working at the windlass, for it took their attention off, and the clanking of the hauls drowned the splash of the oars as the two boats approached.

Nearer and nearer, till they could hear the voices of the men on the forecastle.

Rodney Ray rose in the stern-sheets of his boat, and silently motioned to George Vane in the other to steer more to the left, so as to come up on the larboard side of the schooner.

They are now close under her stern, and, at Rodney's signal, one boat diverged to the left, while he steered his up under the starboard quarter.

Big Bob rose in the bow, and standing upright, grasping the painter in one hand, his iron bar in other, prepared to leap on board.

"Boat ahoy! What boat's that? Keep off, I say!"

They were discovered ; the voice came from the poop of the schooner.

"Give way, lads !" shouted Rodney. "Three cheers, and board her in the smoke."

A few vigorous strokes brought both boats alongside the gangway on either side.

"Keep off, or I'll fire into you !" cried the man on the poop.

No notice was taken of his threat, and the next moment the shots were fired, neither of which did any damage beyond leaving little holes in the woodwork.

Big Bob, taking the boat's painter in his teeth, clambered up on the bulwarks, and with a terrible shout leaped down on the deck, whirling his iron bar round his head, and shouting at the top of his voice—

"Surrender, you thieving villains, in the name of the law !"

At the same moment the other boat shot up to the larboard gangway, and Billy-go-easy on his side was the first to gain the deck. The crews of the two boats then hauled up as best they could, and in less than a minute all were on board, and a desperate fight commenced. Bob, swinging his iron bar around, felled two to the deck who rushed to the gangway to oppose the boarding-party, and crippled another. This gave Rodney's boat's crew an opportunity to gain the deck, which was accomplished without trouble.

A rush was immediately made towards the fore-castle, where the greater number of the crew of this piratical craft were assembled.

The sudden onslaught of our friends of course produced some confusion and no little panic, but unfortunately the ruffians were all better armed than Rodney's party, and soon was heard the sharp crack of half-a-dozen pistols. Two seamen fell wounded, while Big Bob received a shot through the fleshy part of his arm. Rodney and George Vane discharged their revolvers in rapid succession amongst the dense mass of men on the fore-castle, with excellent effect, as was evidenced by the cries of pain their bullets elicited.

It was obvious, however, that the fight could not be gained in this manner, for there were only two pistols among the attacking party.

A hand-to-hand combat was destined to decide this affair.

Rodney Ray was the first to leap on the fore-castle. He had seized an iron belaying-pin from the rail, and threw himself among the thick of the enemy, dealing blows right and left. Bob, who had fallen from the shock caused by the bullet wound in his arm, rose bleeding and infuriated with pain. So soon as he gained the fore-castle the affair was virtually decided, for in three blows of his terrible bar he knocked down half-a-dozen of the enemy and caused the others to scatter in terror.

At the same moment George Vane, who had armed himself with a handspike, leaped on the fore-castle on the other side, followed by his party, and the victory was almost decided. The crew of the schooner clambered out over the bows, two or three dropping into the water, and clinging to the chain-cable, and in less than a minute all opposition in that part of the ship was at an end.

There was work to be done aft, however, yet, as several shots fired from the cabin attested.

Seeing that all opposition had been overcome forward, Rodney Ray leaped down and ran aft.

"This way, my jolly lads ; follow me. Ten pounds for the man who kills or captures that murderous scoundrel, Yellow Dick."

He had caught a glimpse of that worthy's villainous countenance peering from one of the cabin windows from which he had just fired his pistol. A bullet whistled past our hero's ear ; but this did not stop him, however, and in a few seconds the cabin door was burst open and the victorious party entered with a rush. Yellow Dick, however, did not wait to come to close quarters, but ran into one of the after-cabins, fastening the door behind him. When this was burst open he had made his escape by leaping overboard.

Rodney soon set George Vane and the greater part of his men to work securing the vanquished and providing against

further mischief. Six prisoners were made only. The rest had leaped overboard, and managed to get into the boat which lay under the bows. By the time the six were secured, this boat was seen half a mile off, making rapidly for the shore. There were at least twenty men in her, and to have given chase would have been mad in the extreme ; as it was they were glad to escape. If pursued, they would of course see that they had the advantage, and make a desperate resistance.

So soon as the half-dozen remaining had been secured, Rodney commenced to search for Leah, who he felt assured was on board. He was not mistaken.

Crouching in the corner of the starboard after-cabin, endeavouring to cover herself with a piece of old sail-cloth, he found the ill-used girl ; her face, neck, and shoulders scratched and bleeding ; her scanty night-dress nearly torn from her person. At first she gave a cry of joy on recognising our hero, but this was followed by one of dismay and anguish—

“ Oh, don't, don't ! ” she added. “ Do go away, or give me some clothes ! ”

Rodney had no coat or cloak of any kind, but George Vane had a large one, which he at once procured and threw to her.

Meanwhile, it appeared that there was fresh cause for apprehension.

Those who in panic had taken to the large boat now seemed to have repented. Instead of continuing their course to the nearest shore, the boat was again headed towards the schooner.

They could be seen in the bright moonlight reloading their pistols.

A man whom Billy-go-easy declared he could recognize as Yellow Dick, was standing up in the stern-sheets haranguing them.

Rodney and George Vane could distinctly see him pointing towards the schooner.

They had recovered from their panic and now, seeing

by how small a force they had been put to rout, were being urged by their leader to retake the vessel.

Three of Rodney's party were wounded, and it required a couple more to guard the prisoners.

His resolution was soon taken, and as quickly put into execution.

"Jump aloft, some of you, and loose the topsails. Billy, bear a hand, and unshackle the cable. We'll slip the anchor. The breeze is blowing dead up the harbour, and we can run her ashore in twenty minutes."

The topsails were loosed, the cable slipped, and, as he said, in less than a quarter of an hour the schooner was run aground within a hundred yards of the shore, near the Government Gardens.

The boat containing the baffled kidnappers followed for a short time, but when Rodney commenced burning blue lights as signals of distress they hauled off, and, taking advantage of the fact of the setting of the moon, rowed off in the darkness.

All hands, including the prisoners, were safely got in the boat, and, in less than an hour from the time when Leah had been so audaciously abducted, she was carried back to the hotel in the arms of her rescuer, Rodney Ray.

The six prisoners were left on board the schooner, as Rodney by no means saw the necessity of hampering the boats with them. There was, by this time, a thorough alarm, and scarcely had they landed than they were surrounded by a curious crowd, who had heard the firing in the harbour, and now thronged the landing-steps.

Leaving George Vane to explain matters to the police, our hero carried his almost insensible burden into the hotel, and safely deposited her in the room whence an hour before she had been forcibly carried off.

Events had marched rapidly; an abduction, a fight, a rescue, and a complete success, all within an hour.

Having safely deposited her in her own room, Rodney sent some of the maidservants to attend to her, and himself hurried off to procure a surgeon, fearing lest she might have

been seriously hurt by the rough treatment to which she had been subjected.

Such, however, was fortunately not the case, and just as the dawn of day began to appear in the east, our hero and George Vane went to bed to snatch a few hours' repose.

Thus ended this attempt to abduct the "golden barmaid."

Rodney, by his promptitude and courage, had saved her from her enemies, and earned at once her lasting gratitude and a prescriptive right over the secret of the golden valley.

CHAPTER XLI.

LEAH'S FEARS.

LEAH, although saved from the ruffians who had risked such an audacious attempt to become possessed of her person, could by no means be pacified.

She had received a terrible shock, and implored Rodney to take her away that very day, very hour, from Sydney.

It was in vain that he urged on her the utter improbability of any fresh attempt.

In vain he pointed out to her that for some time, at least, all the energies of the conspirators would be devoted to keeping themselves out of the hands of justice.

Leah would not listen.

She would leave Sydney or kill herself.

Life, amidst such constant terror, was insupportable.

She bitterly regretted and cursed the day she had ever become possessed of the fatal secret, and in her excitement declared that she would publish it abroad—advertise all she knew in the Sydney papers, so that there should no longer be any motive for her being kidnapped, tortured, and perhaps murdered.

It required all Rodney's persuasive powers to divert her from this plan, and had he not threatened to leave her to herself to fight her own battle—do what she chose—she might possibly have kept her word.

She was a brave girl, but the constant terror in which she had been for so long a time preyed upon her mind, and now she was in a low, nervous, hysterical state, little removed from absolute madness.

The very evening of the day following the all but successful attempt of the band of villains against her liberty, Rodney, George Vane, Billy-go-easy, and Blackball Bob, left Sydney quietly, and, as they thought, unknown to anyone, and put up that night at the Kangaroo Inn, in Parramatta, distant from the city eighteen miles.

Such precautions were taken that our party of adventurers thought it next to impossible they could be followed.

Nevertheless, Leah was in a state of the greatest excitement, not to say terror, at the thought of again falling into their hands.

The rude and violent manner she had been torn from her bed, and carried on board the schooner, without regard either to the bodily injury that might be inflicted, or still less to the agony of shame she suffered in being exposed to the gaze and rough handling of those ruffians in her night-dress only, which latter was partly torn from her—the memory of this preyed on her mind, and she was in an excitable, nervous state, occasionally glancing behind her in a frightened manner long after they left Sydney.

They went by steamboat up the Parramatta river, and Rodney endeavoured to beguile her thoughts from the terrors of the past night, by pointing out the beauties of the scenery, and reassuring her by explaining how impossible it was that there could be any ground for alarm.

“For,” he said, “the steamer goes only once a day, and by this time to-morrow we shall be well on our way up country.”

“Yes, but suppose they should have obtained the knowledge that we are on board? There is a road through

Parramatta and Penrith, the main road to that part of the country where we are going. They may easily get before us."

"Not easily, Leah," Rodney said ; "they might, it is true, just manage to get before us by hard riding along the road, but I anticipate nothing of the kind ; I imagine they will be only too glad to be quiet, in order to escape the police, who are now looking after them. Remember, I gave full particulars this morning at the court, and described such as I could accurately."

CHAPTER XLII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY.

PARRAMATTA is, or was, a village on the great coach high-road over the Blue Mountains to the plains of Bathurst and the gold country around the Turon river, near which stream, at a place called Ophir, the precious metal was first discovered on the Australian continent. Now, however, it is a town, rapidly rising in wealth and importance.

The Kangaroo end was at the farthest extremity, and had been selected by our party on account of its being the quietest and the one least likely to be visited by rough customers. It stood back a little way from the road, and so was less open to the observation of casual passers-by.

They were fortunate in securing a sitting-room and three bed-rooms, a single one for the young lady, and two double-bedded ones for Billy-go-easy and Black-ball Bob, Rodney and George Vane respectively. The sitting-room and all three bed-rooms were on the first floor of the inn and adjoining. There was but one staircase, and that was a narrow one.

All this Leah noticed in a very brief examination. She did not forget, too, to inspect the bed-room windows. They were small, and could easily be barricaded. There was no balcony, so she need not fear a repetition of the attempt of the previous night.

While she was taking off her hat and shawl, and unpacking the small trunk she had brought with her, George Vane and Rodney walked out to reconnoitre, and also to talk over affairs and arrange their plans.

Half an hour was sufficient for them to be convinced that at present there was no need to apprehend anything, and also to settle as to the future.

Rodney Ray proposed, and his friend agreed, as the plan of operations, to remain at this quiet inn for a couple of days in order to give Leah an opportunity to rest and compose herself after the terrors of the past night. Also to make sure they were not followed, and to purchase horses and a light cart and dray for the journey.

Five horses would be required, and these, with the dray, would cost a hundred pounds at the least. Then it was decided that one of them should return to Sydney and purchase a couple of double-barrelled rifles, three more revolvers, tools, axes, and a few necessities for Leah. They had left so hurriedly that there had been no time for anything of the sort.

George Vane volunteered with alacrity to return to Sydney next day, and execute all commissions there, while Rodney was to see about the purchase of the horses, dray, and provisions, and make all other preparations.

When they returned they found Leah awaiting them at a well-spread tea-table.

Rodney briefly explained to Leah the nature of the plans he and his friend had fixed upon.

Hitherto there had been no discussion at all; Leah had related nothing as to how she became aware of the existence of this golden valley.

This she had promised to do, but the subject was evidently and naturally painful to her, considering the hardships she

must have gone through, the indignities she had probably suffered, and the constant terror she must have been in for her very life when left at the mercy of the mutineers. She had promised a brief relation of what had occurred, and how she became possessed of the information, and Rodney was content to wait until she should choose to do so, well knowing that the girl spoke the truth.

After the evening meal was concluded, she expressed her intention of retiring to rest, as she felt utterly worn-out and fatigued.

"I will barricade my window," she said, "this time, and leave my door open. I look to you to see that no fresh attempt is successful."

She held his hand as she spoke, in the act of bidding him good night, and the gentle pressure with which she accompanied the words touched his heart.

"Fear not, Leah; I will arrange. A watch shall be kept. For the future we will never all sleep at the same time; one, at least, shall be awake and ready to give an alarm."

She wished them all good night, and retired.

"And now, lads," said Rodney to the two sailors, "we'll have some grog; then, while we're drinking it, I'll tell you briefly what I propose—let you know something more of the nature of the adventure we are bound on."

CHAPTER XLIII.

LEAH'S NARRATIVE.

THE grog was ordered, and Rodney commenced to explain. The reader will understand the necessity for this, as the sailors had only the vaguest idea in the world of where they were going, and what they were going for.

"George Vane, you know all about it," Rodney went on; "you, my lads, don't, so it's to you I'm talking. I'll put it in a few words, and then you can decide as to whether you feel inclined to go on with us or not."

"All right," said Big Bob, "let's have a drink all round first, to the memory of old times."

The glasses were filled, and then Bob proposed the toast.

"Here's to Billy Taylor, the cabin-boy that *was*, a handsome young lady that *is*, and Mrs. Rodney Ray that is to be!"

George Vane laughed immoderately, and as Rodney thought, maliciously, at this speech of the sailor's. His laugh was echoed by the light silvery tones of Leah's voice; her door and the room door were open, and she had heard what Bob said. The toast was duly drank, and then Leah called out—

"Rodney, I want to speak to you; come and help me to barricade my window."

This was no very difficult task, for the window of her room was exceptionally small and in ten minutes he had so fixed it as to bid defiance to any one breaking in without great noise, and occupying plenty of time for an alarm.

"And now, before you go, I'll tell you just a little as to the locality of the place I'm going to take you to. After we have crossed the Blue Mountains, we pass over the plains, and come to the town of Bathurst. From thence to the Turon gold mines is about forty miles. Half-way on that road there is to be seen a hill with a conical peak, which is called the burning mountain; not that I have ever seen smoke issuing from it, but because I believe it has been known to emit smoke and flame. In short, it was, or was supposed to be, a small volcano.

"I have been nearly to the top of this mountain, though it is fully thirty miles from the road, and as many from any habitation.

"From there I can discern another hill—one of a clump of several—and from this latter I can find my way to a blaze tree line, which leads across the bush to a certain creek; following this creek, I can find my way to a deep gully, and half a mile from the upper end of this gully, about two-thirds

of the way up another of these circular clumps, is the Golden Valley—I call it the Golden Valley because I have no better name for it.

“It is only about two hundred yards in diameter, and situated as it is on the sloping side of a hill, and not between two hills, it does not deserve the name of a valley. But so I have called it, and now it shall retain its name.

“It is more like a great circular chasm, a gigantic mark in the side of the hill, than anything else.

“There are many such hills, and hundreds—I daresay thousands—of such little valleys.

“I should never be able to find this one but for the blaze tree line which leads right up to it—I ought to know it, for I helped make it; many a score of trees have I wearily blazed with my axe, and been sworn at and abused for not working better. Bill Bloxam, though better than the majority of them, was a great scoundrel.”

“Bill Bloxam—I remember him on board the——”

“Yes—he and I discovered the Golden Valley.”

“When are you going to tell me the tale, Leah?”

“Not now—not now. Wait till we get at least in the neighbourhood. On the day we reach the so-called burning mountain, I will tell you all—all I have gone through, and how I discovered this place. But to get on with what I am now speaking of—the gold—the almost boundless wealth there concealed. There were only two of us. I was then much weaker and smaller than I am now. Then I was a mere girl—now I am a grown woman. We only went three times, and each time we came away with more than five hundred ounces of gold.”

“Fifteen hundred ounces in three days! Only two of you—it seems incredible!”

“Three days?” she said smiling. “We were only there for two hours each day—we travelled a long weary way, I can tell you.”

“Fifteen hundred ounces in three days! Leah, why do you know that is worth more than five thousand pounds?”

“I daresay,” she said, quietly; “I never took the trouble

to calculate. It was so plentiful. We might have got fifteen hundred weight had we the means of carrying it in safety. Bloxam planned to buy some bullock drays, and get a lot of black fellows, the natives, to come with him—he thought to load some of these with a ton or so a piece, and then take it down to Sydney without letting anyone be the wiser. But they found him out, and his life paid the penalty. Ah, well, never mind that—now I have told you all I am going to tell you—good night !”

Rodney returned to the room where he had left the others, and in a few words revealed to Billy-go-easy and Big Bob the object he had in view ; also the prodigious treasure contained in the Golden Valley.

At this latter Big Bob opened his eyes, and when our hero asked him if he were willing to go on with the adventure—

“ Ay, that I am,” he replied, “ and so’s Billy here, I’ll be bound—only to think, tons o’ gold ! Lor’, Billy, what a shine we shall cut when we get back to Ratcliff Highway !”

“ Take it easy, lad, take it easy. All’s well that ends well. If we get the gold, all right ; if we don’t, so much the worse.”

For an hour or so our friends sat up ; then the rest of the night was divided into four watches of two hours each, and all but one sought their beds.

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN SEARCH OF THE GOLDEN VALLEY.

A WEEK has passed, and in that time our five friends, Leah, Rodney, Vane, Big Bob, and Billy-go-easy have crossed the Blue Mountains, Bathurst plains, and some forty miles of bush country beyond. Two hundred miles will about express the distance they have traversed.

Up to the last evening they had seen or heard nothing to cause alarm.

Leah rode in the light dray they had purchased, while the others walked, or, when the road was good, and the vehicle could be driven at a good pace, trotted alongside.

The strictest watch was kept night and day.

Leah, however, at night insisted on taking her turn.

Each night on the journey they camped out.

A large fire was lighted, and while the men slept around this a rough couch was made for Leah beneath the dray.

She always took the first watch, that is from about nine o'clock, when the others rolled themselves up in their blankets by the fire, to eleven, when she called Rodney and then herself retired, not, however, without having a few minutes' quiet talk with her lover, the only opportunity she got for private conversation all day.

He had become a much more ardent lover during the progress of the journey. He saw more of her, and appreciated her tenderness to him—her beauty—her kindness of heart, and the many good qualities which a more intimate acquaintance revealed.

It is said that absence makes the heart grow fonder—quite a mistake.

For the first day or two Rodney could not entirely banish the image of Cora Nina from his thoughts. He felt some qualms of conscience regarding that young lady, especially when he remembered how he had asked her to supper, and she promptly came at some sacrifice to her pride; and then how had he rewarded her kindness? He had put upon her the greatest slight which man could upon woman, had scorned her—slighted her for another, in that other's presence.

But as time passed on, and their distance from Sydney increased each day by some thirty or forty miles, his remorse grew feebler, and soon he ceased to trouble any more about it.

But Cora Nina, forlorn and deserted, was determined to be avenged.

On the seventh day after their departure, Leah, with triumphant joy, pointed out the conical hill which she had heard called the burning mountain.

"There Rodney, look! I knew I was right. Now everything is familiar to me. In two days from this time I will lead you into the Golden Valley."

"We must be very cautious, Leah," Rodney said, uneasily.

"Cautious! Why so now more than before?" she asked.

"I scarcely know," he replied, for he did not wish to alarm her; "I suppose, now that we seem to get nearer the goal, I appreciate more the value of the prize. At first, you remember, I was quite careless, while you were full of alarms."

She was satisfied, and no more was said on the subject; but he took an early opportunity of questioning Billy-go-easy more closely as to something he had observed on the previous night.

"You are sure you saw something last night, Billy?"

"Yes, and again to-night, but I couldn't make out what. Seemed to me like men, but whatever they were they kept so far off, and dodged from tree to tree so quick, that I couldn't say more than that I saw some moving things flitting about like shadows or ghosts; and what's more, I've seen 'em again to-night."

"Then you think we are followed, Billy—watched, our steps dogged?"

"It's hard to say. It mout be monkeys, or black fellows of some of the native tribes, or anything."

"I think we'd better strike out into the road again to-morrow, instead of going straight on to the Golden Valley. If we are followed they'll wait till we lead them there and then fall on us and murder us."

"Just as you like, old shipmate; you've got the head-piece, and you're the skipper o' the ship. I'm bound for the Golden Valley, but as to how we're to get there safe, and have it all to ourselves, I leave that to you."

"Well, don't say anything to-night; to-morrow I'll talk to Leah and tell her what we suspect; meanwhile we must

keep a sharp look-out, and all lie with our arms close beside us, so as to be prepared to jump up and fight in a moment."

"All right. She keeps the first watch, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Hadn't one of us better take it, if there's any fear? I'm certain a'most I saw either men or monkeys awhile back."

"No, it would only alarm her needlessly," Rodney replied; "I daresay we shan't be all asleep before her watch is out. It's my next turn, you know, and I'll keep awake. To-morrow I'll tell her about it."

To-morrow!

CHAPTER XLV.

CONCLUSION.

THE morrow came.

Rodney Ray, however, did not keep awake till the girl's watch was over. They had come farther than usual that day, and he was especially tired. Though he tried all he could to keep awake, the warmth of the fire, as he lay stretched before it, and the slow breathing of the other three sleepers, quickly lulled his faculties, and he passed into dreamland. The last thing he remembered was that his horse, tethered up at a few yards' distance, was restive, and showed a disposition for his liberty. This, however, was nothing unusual. He knew that Leah was awake and watching, for an instant previously he had seen her move round the cart.

Then he fell asleep.

He was awakened by George Vane—

"Hi! Rodney, old fellow, what's the time—why haven't I been called? It must be my spell now."

"Eh, what—no, nonsense—it isn't day yet, or Leah would have called me. But I take it it must be near morning, I can tell by the feel of the air, and see to the fire, it is almost out. Leah must have gone to sleep. Leah!"

He called her, but there was no answer.

Then he and Rodney went to the dray and looked underneath, where she slept. She might have called him and he have gone to sleep again, he said to himself.

But she was not under the dray!

Then he called aloud.

No answer.

Then he shouted at the top of his voice.

Still no answer.

Now they were all awake, and looked in blank astonishment in each other's faces in the early morning dawn.

It was quite six o'clock; Leah had not called any one of them, so they had slept on.

Where could she be? What could have become of her?

No one was able to answer that question.

They shouted all of them at the top of their voices. They wandered out into the forest. It was all in vain.

At last, however, one of the horses was missed—Rodney's—this was equally unaccountable.

Vainly they searched and shouted. All that day one of them remained at the camp, while the others searched the bush. But neither horse nor Leah could they find the slightest traces of.

Gone—vanished!

With bitter self-reproach Rodney was compelled to come to the conclusion that her enemies had outwitted them, and had at last succeeded in kidnapping her. How it could have been effected without alarming any one of them, it was difficult to conceive.

Still there was the fact—the girl was gone! Nor did our adventurers succeed in finding any clue to the mystery that day—nor the day after—nor at all.

Neither could they discover the Golden Valley, though they spent a whole week in the attempt ; Rodney thinking that perhaps she had been seized, and forced to lead her enemies there.

For a whole week they scoured the bush till they were of opinion that there could be scarce a spot within a radius of twenty miles where a mouse could be concealed.

Desperately reluctant to relinquish the search, George Vane and Big Bob went off with the cart to procure more provisions, their stock having run short, leaving Rodney and Billy-go-easy to prosecute the search.

Rodney declared that from the accurate description given to him he could find the blaze tree line which led to the Golden Valley.

But after another week's wearisome wandering in the dismal and monotonous bush, the hearts of all the party sank within them, and it was unanimously agreed that to waste further time and labour was sheer folly.

So backward they turned their footsteps, crest-fallen and dejected, and after an absence of a month, again put up at the inn at Parramatta whence they had started.

Not only had they failed, but had not even been successful in guarding the depositress of the great secret.

What made their great discomfiture more complete, and caused Rodney many a bitter pang, was the thought that Leah had fallen into the hands of her enemies, who had doubtless forced her to lead them to the Golden Valley.

Again and again our hero felt desperately inclined to turn back and renew the search. But his companions dissuaded him. It would, they said, with some truth, be little better than madness. If they could find no trace of the lost girl or the Golden Valley in a fortnight, a year would give no better result.

Besides, there was a scarcity of the ways and means. Over two hundred pounds had been expended in purchasing horses, dray, arms, &c., and now Rodney had little more than fifty remaining. George Vane had none, but he had means of getting a supply in Sydney.

Altogether, the course they adopted was the only practicable one.

"Farewell to all our dreams of wealth! Farewell visions of a valley the whole ground of which is covered with lumps of gold—farewell bright hopes! I feel as if I had awakened from a dream of fairyland to all the hard cold realities of this material world!"

These were the words of George Vane, as they again entered Sydney.

"And farewell happiness and peace of mind, farewell buoyant hope and joyous aspirations!" Rodney said. "I feel like a criminal; that girl's fate will weigh on my spirits through life. I shall never forgive myself. Alas, poor Leah!"

"And now what is to be done?" asked Vane.

"I know not, care not!" was the moody reply of our hero, who seemed to have lost all life and spirit.

"For my part," said Vane, "I shall return to England. I've had enough of rampaging about the world, for a while, and mean at all events to take a year's rest."

"As for me," said Big Bob, "I mean to up stick, and away. I feel kind o' low spirited arter this affair. I shall make tracks for Yankee land, I reckon, and have a cruise or two on the Black Ball Line.

"And what are you going to do, Billy?"

"Well, lad," replied the old sailor, "I shall just take it easy, and make the best I can o' things. We've no right to expect all smooth water and fair sailing in our cruise in this here ship—the world we live in—I mean to make the best of it, and keep a stiff upper lip.

"So let the world jog on as it will,
I'll be free and easy still,"

• ~~chorus~~, mates, chorus—

"Free and easy,
Free and easy,
I'll be free and easy still."

The chorus with which our friends favoured the indefatigable Billy-go-easy was but a dismal one.

They could not but acknowledge that, considering all things, his was the best plan.

He had been less elated at the prospect of fabulous wealth, and now that all was over—their bright hopes dashed, their glowing anticipations of the Golden Valley nought but a memory of the past—Billy-go-easy was less cast down and dispirited than any.

Rodney was the worst ; his gay, buoyant nature had received a hard shock, and for a time, at least, all the fire had been taken out of him.

“And what shall you do, Rodney ? ” asked Vane.

“I don’t know,” our hero replied, with a faint smile ; “reckon I shall cruise about a bit.”

“Won’t you come to England with me ? ”

“No,” was the emphatic reply, “I shall knock about these latitudes a bit yet ; I suppose I shall never see the girl again, nor learn her fate, but if ever I come across any of those ruffians, I’ll avenge her.”

“Well, well, as you will ; I must return home, so I suppose we shall each go on our way. Who knows whether we shall ever meet again ? ”

The hour of parting came ; they shook hands, bade each other farewell, and Rodney Ray was once more alone in the world.

For a week he remained in Sydney, and then thought of going on to Melbourne.

Cora Nina had proceeded there to fulfil an engagement at the theatre.

But something arose, which entirely altered his plans.

One morning, glancing at the advertisements in the “Sydney Morning Herald,” the principal paper in the colony, he saw his own name.

“Rodney Ray :—This gentleman is requested to return to England at once ; his father lies dangerously ill, with little hopes of recovery.”

This advertisement was dated four months back, London.

Rodney at once made up his mind, took his passage on the mail steamer, and returned to England by the overland route.

After nearly five years' wandering to and fro on the face of the globe, he once more set foot on his native soil.

Looking back on all he had gone through—the perils he had surmounted, the stirring scenes he had witnessed, the adventures in which he had borne a part—it was hard to believe that all had taken place in less than five years.

On making his way back to the old home, he found he was the last of his name.

His father had been dead for two months, and had left him his blessing and the bulk of his property.

Lucy Maitland was travelling abroad with her father, and no one knew their address.

So he resolved to settle down—to try and forget that he had ever borne an active part in the drama of life—to banish from memory all thoughts of Leah, Cora Nina, and his many stirring, but by no means, in all cases, creditable adventures.

In short, to forget that he had ever been a Scapegrace ; and for the future—a sadder and a wiser man—to lead the life of an English country gentleman.

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